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LITERARY VALUES
AND OTHER PAPERS
AND
WHITMAN: A STUDY

BY

John Burroughs

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LITERARY VALUES

I

LITERARY VALUES

I

THE day inevitably comes to every writer when he must take his place amid the silent throngs of the past, when no new work from his pen can call attention to him afresh, when the partiality of his friends no longer counts, when his friends and admirers are themselves gathered to the same silent throng, and the spirit of the day in which he wrote has given place to the spirit of another and a different day. How, oh, how will it fare with him then? How is it going to fare with Lowell and Longfellow and Whittier and Emerson and all the rest of them? How has it fared with so many names in the past, that were, in their own day, on all men's tongues? Of the names just mentioned, Whittier and Emerson shared more in a particular movement of thought and morals of the times in which they lived than did the other two, and to that extent are they in danger of dropping out and losing their vogue. Both had a significance to their own day and genera-

tion that they can hardly have to any other. The new times will have new soul maladies and need other soul doctors. The fashions of this world pass away — fashions in thought, in style, in humor, in morals, as well as in anything else.

As men strip for a race, so must an author strip for this race with time. All that is purely local and accidental in him will only impede him; all that is put on or assumed will impede him — his affectations, his insincerities, his imitations; only what is vital and real in him, and is subdued to the proper harmony and proportion, will count. A malformed giant will not in this race keep pace with the lesser but better-built stripling. How many more learned and ponderous tomes has Gilbert White's little book left behind! Mere novelty, how short-lived is that! Every age will have its own novelties. Every age will have its own hobbies and hobbyists, its own clowns, its own follies and fashions and infatuations. What every age will not have in the same measure is sanity, proportion, health, penetration, simplicity. The strained and overwrought, the fantastic and far-fetched, are sure to drop out. Every pronounced style, like Carlyle's, is sure to suffer. The obscurities and affectations of some recent English poets and novelists are certain to drag them down. Browning, with his sudden leaps and stops, and all that Italian rubbish, is fearfully handicapped.

Things do not endure in this world without a certain singleness and continence. Trees do not grow and stand upright without a certain balance and proportion. A man does not live out half his days without a certain simplicity of life. Excesses, irregularities, violences, kill him. It is the same with books — they, too, are under the same law; they hold the gift of life on the same terms. Only an honest book can live; only absolute sincerity can stand the test of time. Any selfish or secondary motive vitiates a work of art, as it vitiates a religious life. Indeed, I doubt if we fully appreciate the literary value of the staple, fundamental human virtues and qualities — probity, directness, simplicity, sincerity, love. There is just as much room and need for the exercise of these qualities in the making of a book as in the building of a house, or in a business career. How conspicuous they are in all the enduring books — in Bunyan, in Walton, in Defoe, in the Bible! It is they that keep alive such a book as "Two Years before the Mast," which Stevenson pronounced the best sea-story in the language, as it undoubtedly is. None of Stevenson's books have quite this probity and singleness of purpose, or show this effacement of the writer by the man. It might be said that our interest in such books is not literary at all, but purely human, like our interest in "Robinson Crusoe," or in life and things themselves. The experience itself of a sailor's

life, however, would be to most of us very prosy and distasteful. Hence there is something in the record, something in the man behind the record, that colors his pages, and that is the source of our interest. This personal element, this flavor of character, is the salt of literature. Without it, the page is savorless.

II

It is curious what an uncertain and seemingly capricious thing literary value is. How often it refuses to appear when diligently sought for, labored for, prayed for; and then comes without call to some simple soul that never gave it a thought. Learning cannot compass it, rhetoric cannot compass it, study cannot compass it. Mere wealth of language is entirely inadequate. It is like religion: often those who have it most have it least, and those who have it least have it most. In the works of the great composers — Gibbon, De Quincey, Macaulay — it is a conscious, deliberate product. Then, in other works, the very absence of the literary motive and interest gives an æsthetic pleasure.

One is surprised to read the remark of the "Saturday Review" on the published letters of Whitman, — letters that have no extrinsic literary value whatever, not one word of style, — namely, that few books are so well calculated to "purge the soul of nonsense;" and the remark of the fastidious Henry James on the same subject, that, with all their

enormities of the common, the letters are positively delightful. Here, again, the source of our interest is undoubtedly in the personal revelation, — the type of man we see through the letters, and not in any wit or wisdom lodged in the letters themselves.

One reader seeks religious or moral values alone in the works he reads; another seeks scientific or philosophical values; another, artistic and literary values; others, again, purely human values. No one, I think, would read Scott or Dickens for purely artistic values, while, on the other hand, it seems to me that one would go to Mr. James or to Mr. Howells for little else. One might read Froude with pleasure who had little confidence in him as an historian, but one could hardly read Freeman and discount him in the same way; one might have great delight in Ruskin, who repudiated much of his teaching.

I suppose one comes to like plain literature as he comes to like plain clothes, plain manners, simple living. What grows with us is the taste for the genuine, the real. The less a writer's style takes thought of itself, the better we like it. The less his dress, his equipage, his house, concern themselves about appearances, the more we are pleased with them. Let the purpose be entirely serious, and let the seriousness be pushed till it suggests the heroic; that is what we crave as we grow older and tire of the vanities and shams of the world.

To have literary value is not necessarily to suggest books or literature; it is to possess a certain genuineness and seriousness that is like the validity of real things. See how much better literature Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg is than the more elaborate and scholarly address of Everett on the same occasion. General Grant's "Memoirs" have a higher literary value than those of any other general in our Civil War, mainly because of the greater simplicity, seriousness, and directness of the personality they reveal. There is no more vanity and make-believe in the book than there was in the man. Any touch of the elemental, of the veracity and singleness of the natural forces, gives value to a man's utterances, and Lincoln and Grant were undoubtedly the two most elemental men brought out by the war. The literary value of the Bible, doubtless, arises largely from its elemental character. The utterances of simple, unlettered men — farmers, sailors, soldiers — often have great force and impressiveness from the same cause; there are in them the virtue and seriousness of real things. One great danger of schools, colleges, libraries, is that they tend to kill or to overlay this elemental quality in a man — to make the poet speak from his culture instead of from his heart. "To speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movement of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the road-

side, is the flawless triumph of art;" and who so likely to do this as the simple, unbookish man? Hence Sainte-Beuve says the peasant always has style.

In fiction the literary value resides in several different things, as the characterization, the action, the plot, and the style; sometimes more in one, sometimes more in another. In Scott, for instance, it is found in the characters and the action; the style is commonplace. In George Eliot, the action, the dramatic power, is the weakest factor. In Mr. Howells we care very little for the people, but the art, the style, is a perpetual delight. In Hawthorne our pleasure, again, is more evenly distributed. In Poe the plot and the style interest us. In Dickens it is the character and the action. The novelist has many strings to his bow, and he can get along very well without style, but what can the poet, the historian, the essayist, the critic, do without style — that is, without that vital, intimate, personal relation between the man and his language which seems to be the secret of style? The true poet makes the words his own; he fills them with his own quality, though they be the common property of all. This is why language, in the hands of the born writer, is not the mere garment of thought, not even a perfectly adjusted and transparent garment, as a French writer puts it. It is a garment only as the body is the garment of the soul. This is why a writer

with a style loses so much in a translation, while with the ordinary composer translation is little more than a change of garments.

I should say that the literary value of the modern French writers and critics resides more in their style than in anything else, while with the German it resides least in the style; in the English it resides in both thought and style. The French fall below the English in lyric poetry, because, while the Frenchman has more vanity, he has less egoism, and hence less power to make the universe speak through him. The solitude of the lyric is too much for his intensely social nature, while he excels in the light dramatic forms for this very reason. He has more power of intellectual metamorphosis.

Apart from style and the other qualities I have mentioned, is another gift, the gift of narration — the story-teller's gift, which novelists have in varying degrees. Probably few of them have this talent in so large a measure as Wilkie Collins had it, yet this power does not of itself seem sufficient to save his work from oblivion. Still apart from these qualities, and of high literary worth, and apart from the attractiveness of the subject-matter, is the power to interest. Can you interest me in what you have to say, by your manner of saying it? This is one of the most intimate and personal gifts of all. No matter what the subject, some writers, like some speakers, catch our attention at once, and hold it to

the end. They appear to be telling us some important bit of news which they are in a hurry to be delivered of. No time or words are wasted. There is something special and imminent in the look and tone. The sentences are definitely aimed. The man knows what he wants to say and is himself interested in it. His mind is not somnolent or stagnant; the style is specific and direct — no benumbing effects of vague and featureless generalizations. The thoughts move, they make a current, and the reader quickly yields himself to it. How soon we tire of the mumbling, soliloquizing style, where the writer seems talking to himself. He must talk to his reader and must catch his eye.

Then those dead-level sentences that seem to return forever into themselves, that have no direction or fall, that do not point and hurry to some definite conclusion, — we soon yawn over these too.

What rare power the late Henry George had to invest his subject with interest! What a current in his book "Progress and Poverty"! — While it seems to me that in his "Social Evolution" Benjamin Kidd suffers from the want of this talent; I do not get the full force of his periods at the first reading.

III

Literature abounds in attempts to define literature. One of the most strenuous and thorough-going definitions I have seen has lately been published by one

of our college professors — it is a most determined attempt to corral the whole subject. "Nothing belongs to real literature," says the professor, "unless it consists of written words that constitute a carrying statement which makes sense, arranged rhythmically, euphoniously, and harmoniously, and so chosen as to connote an adequate number of ideas and things, the suggestion of which will call up in the reader sustained emotions which do not produce undue tension, and in which the element of pleasure predominates, on the whole, over that of pain. Practically," the writer goes on to say, "every word of this description should be kept in our minds, so that we may consciously apply it as a test to any piece of writing about the literary character of which we are in doubt."

Fancy a reader, in his quest for the real article, going about with this drag-net of a paragraph in his mind. Will the definition or description bear turning around upon itself? Is it a good sample of literary art? The exactness and literalness of science are seldom permissible in literature. That a definition of anything may have literary value it must possess a certain indirect and imaginative character, as when Carlyle defined poetry as the heroic of speech. Contrast with the above John Morley's definition of literature: "All the books — and they are not so many — where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attrac-

tion of form." This is much better literature, because the language is much more flexible and imaginative. It imparts more warmth to the mind; it is more suggestive, while as a literary touchstone it is just as available.

Good literature may be a much simpler thing than our teachers would lead us to believe. The prattle of a child may have rare literary value. The little Parisian girl who, when asked by a lady the price of the trinkets she offered for sale, replied, "Judge for yourself, madam; I have tasted no food since yesterday," expressed herself with consummate art. If she had said simply, "Whatever your ladyship pleases to give," her reply would have been graceful, but commonplace. By the personal turn which she gave it, she added almost a lyrical touch. When Thackeray changed the title of one of his novels from "Scenes from Town Life," or some such title, to "Vanity Fair," he achieved a stroke of art. It is said that a now famous line of Keats was first written thus:

> "A thing of beauty is a continual joy."

How the effect of the line was heightened by the change of one word, and itself became "a joy forever." Poe, too, altered two lines of his with like magical effect, when for

> "To the beauty of fair Greece,
> And the grandeur of old Rome,"

he wrote:

> "To the glory that was Greece,
> And the grandeur that was Rome."

The phrase "well of pure English" conveys the same idea as "well of English undefiled," but how much greater the artistic value of the latter than of the former! Thus the literary value of a sentence may turn upon a single word.

The everyday speech of the people is often full of the stuff of which literature is made. No poet could invent better epithets and phrases than abound in the common vernacular. The sayings and proverbs of a people are also, for the most part, of the pure gold of literature.

One trouble with all definitions of literature is that they proceed upon the theory that literature is a definite something that may be determined by definite tests like gold or silver, whereas it is more like life or nature itself. It is not so much something as the visible manifestation of something; it assumes infinite forms, and is of infinite degrees of potency. There is great literature, and there is feeble and commonplace literature: a romance by Hawthorne and a novel by Haggard; a poem by Tennyson and a poem by Tupper; an essay by Emerson and an essay by John Forster — all literature, all touching the emotions and the imagination with varying degrees of power, and yet separated by a gulf. There are no degrees of excellence in gold or

silver, but there are all degrees of excellence in literature. How hard it is to tell what makes a true poem, a lasting poem! When one asks himself what it is, how many things arise, how hard to narrow the list down to a few things! Is it beauty? Then what is beauty? One meets with beautiful poems every day that he never thinks of or recurs to again. It is certain that without one thing there is no real poetry — genuine passion. The fire came down out of heaven and consumed Elijah's offering because Elijah was sincere. Plan and build your poem never so deftly, mankind will not permanently care for it unless it has genuine feeling. It must be impassioned.

The genus Literature includes many species, as novels, poems, essays, histories, etc., but our business with them all is about the same — they are books that we read for their own sake. We read the papers for the news, we read a work of science for the facts and the conclusions, but a work of literature is an end in and of itself. We read it for the pleasure and the stimulus it affords us, apart from any other consideration. It exhibits such a play of mind and emotion upon the facts of life and nature as results in our own mental and spiritual enrichment and edification.

Another thing is true of the best literature: we cannot separate our pleasure and profit in the subject-matter from our pleasure and profit in the per-

sonality of the writer. We do not know whether it is Hawthorne himself that we most delight in, or his style and the characters and the action of his romance. One thing is quite certain: where there is no distinct personal flavor to the page, no stamp of a new individual force, we soon tire of it. The savor of every true literary production comes from the man himself. Hence, without attempting a formal definition of literature, one may say that the literary quality seems to arise from a certain vital relation of the writer with subject-matter. It is *his* subject; it blends with the very texture of his mind; his relation to it is primary and personal, not secondary and mechanical. The secret is not in any prescribed arrangement of the words — it is in the quality of mind or spirit that warms the words and shines through them. A good book, says Milton, is the precious life-blood of a master spirit. Unless there is blood in it, unless the vital currents of a rare spirit flow through it and vivify it, it has not the gift of life.

In all good literature we have a sense of touching something alive and real. The writer uses words not as tools or appliances; they are more like his hand or his eye or his ear — the living, palpable body of his thought, the incarnation of his spirit.

The true writer always establishes intimate and personal relations with his reader. He comes forth, he is not concealed; he is immanent in his words, we feel him, our spirits touch his spirit.

Style in letters is a quality of mind — a certain flavor imparted to words by the personality back of them. Pass language through one mind and it is tasteless and colorless; pass it through another, and it acquires an entirely new value and significance and gives us a unique pleasure. In the one case the sentences are artificial; in the other they bud and sprout out of the man himself as naturally as the plants and trees out of the soil.

There is nothing else in the world so sensitive and chameleon-like as language; it takes on at once the hue and quality of the mind that uses it. See how neutral and impersonal, or old and worn and faded the words look in the pages of some writers, then see how drastic or new and individual they become when a mind of another type marshals them into sentences. What vigor and life in them! they seem to have been newly coined since we last met them. It is the test of a writer's real worth — does the language tarnish, as it were, in his hand, or is it brightened and freshened in his use?

A book may contain valuable truths and sound sentiments of universal appeal, but if the literary coinage is feeble, if the page is not strongly individualized, freshly and clearly stamped by the purpose of the writer, it cannot take rank as good literature. To become literature, truth must be perpetually reborn, reincarnated, and begin life anew.

A successful utterance always has value, always

has truth, though in its purely intellectual aspects it may not correspond with the truth as we see it. I cannot accept all of Ruskin's views upon our civilization or all of Tolstoi's upon art, yet I see that they speak the truth as it defines itself to their minds and feelings. A counter-statement may be equally true. The struggle for existence goes on in the ideal world as well as in the real. The strongest mind, the fittest statement, survives for the time being. That a system of philosophy or religion perishes or is laid aside is not because it is not or was not true, but because it is not true to the new minds and under the new conditions. It no longer expresses what the world thinks and feels. It is outgrown. Was not Calvinism true to our fathers? It is no longer true to us because we were born at a later day in the world. With regard to truths of science, we may say, once a truth always a truth, because the world of fact and of things is always under the same law, but the truth of sentiments and emotions changes with changing minds and hearts. The tree of life, unlike all other trees, bears different fruit to each generation. What our fathers found nourishing and satisfying in religion, in art, in philosophy, we find tasteless and stale. Every gospel has its day. The moral and intellectual horizon of the race is perpetually changing.

IV

In our modern democratic communities the moral sense is no doubt higher than it was in the earlier ages, while the artistic or æsthetic sense is lower. In the Athenian the artistic sense was far above the moral; in the Puritan the reverse was the case. The Latin races seem to have a greater genius for art than the Teutonic, while the latter excel in virtue. In this country, good taste exists in streaks and spots, or sporadically here and there. There does not seem to be enough to go around, or the supply is intermittent. One writer has it and another has it not, or one has it to-day and not to-morrow; one moment he writes with grace and simplicity, the next he falls into crudenesses or affectations. There is not enough leaven to leaven the whole lump. Some of our most eminent literary men, such as Lowell and Dr. Holmes, are guilty of occasional lapses from good taste, and probably in the work of none of them do we see the thorough ripening and mellowing of taste that mark the productions of the older and more centralized European communities. One of our college presidents, writing upon a serious ethical subject, allows himself such rhetoric as this: "Experiment and inference are the hook and line by which Science fishes the dry formulas out of the fluid fact. Art, on the other hand, undertakes to stock the stream with choice specimens of her own

breeding and selection." We can hardly say of such metaphors what Sainte-Beuve said of Montaigne's, namely, that they are of the kind that are never "detached from the thought," and that they "seize it in its very centre, in its interior, and join and bind it."

V

The keener appreciation in Europe of literature as a fine art is no doubt the main reason why Poe is looked upon over there as our most noteworthy poet. Poe certainly had a more consummate art than any other American singer, and his productions are more completely the outcome of that art. They are literary feats. "The Raven" was as deliberately planned and wrought out as is any piece of mechanism. Its inspiration is verbal and technical. "The truest poetry is most feigning," says Touchstone, and this is mainly the conception of poetry that prevails in European literary circles. Poe's poetry is artistic feigning, like good acting. It is to that extent disinterested. He does not speak for himself, but for the artistic spirit. He has never been popular in this country, for the reason that art, as such, is far less appreciated here than abroad. The stress of life here is upon the moral and intellectual elements much more than upon the æsthetic. We demand a message of the poet, or that he shall teach us how to live. Poe had no message but that of art; he made no contribution to our stock of

moral ideas; he made no appeal to the conscience or manhood of the race; he did not touch the great common workaday mind of our people. He is more akin to the Latin than to the Anglo-Saxon. Hence his deepest impression seems to have been made upon the French mind. In all our New England poets the voice of humanity, of patriotism, of religious ideas, of strenuous moral purpose, speaks. Art is subordinated to various human passions and emotions. In Poe alone are these emotions subordinated to art. In Poe alone is the effort mainly a verbal and technical one. In him alone is the man lost in the artist. To evoke music from language is his constant aim. No other American poet approaches him in this kind of verbal mastery, in this unfettered creative technical power. In ease, in splendor, in audacity, he is like a bird. One may understand and admire him and not be touched by him. To be moved to anything but admiration is foreign to pure art. Would one make meat and drink of it? Our reading is selfish, we seek our own, we are drawn to the book that is going our way. Can we appreciate beyond our own personal tastes and needs? Can we see the excellence of the impersonal and the disinterested? We want to be touched in some special and intimate way; but art touches us in a general and impersonal way. No one could take to himself Shakespeare, or Milton's "Lycidas," or Keats's odes as directed especially

to his own personal wants and aspirations. We forget ourselves in reading these things, and share for the time the sentiment of pure art, which lives in the universal. How crude the art of Whittier compared with that of Poe, and yet Whittier has touched and moved his countrymen, and Poe has not. There is much more of the substance of character, of patriotism, of strenuous New England life, in the one than in the other. "Snow-Bound" is a metrical transcript from experience; not a creation of the imagination, but a touched-up copy from the memory. We cannot say this of "The Bells" or "The Raven," or of the work of Milton or Keats or Tennyson. Whittier sings what he feels; it all has a root in his own experience. The great poet feigns the emotion and makes it real to us.

We complain of much current verse that it has no feeling. The trouble is not that the poets feign, but that the feigning is feeble; it begets no emotion in us. It simulates, but does not stimulate.

It is not Wordsworth's art that makes him great; it is his profound poetic emotion when in the presence of simple, common things. Tennyson's art, or Swinburne's art, is much finer, but the poetic emotion back of it is less profound and elemental.

Emerson's art is crude, but the stress of his poetic emotion is great; the song is burdened with profound meanings to our moral and spiritual nature.

Poe has no such burden; there is not one crumb of the bread of life in him, but there is plenty of the elixir of the imagination.

This passion for art, so characteristic of the Old World, is seen in its full force in such a writer as Flaubert. Flaubert was a devotee of the doctrine of art for art's sake. He cared nothing for mere authors, but only for "writers;" the work must be the conscious and deliberate product of the author's literary and inventive powers, and in no way involve his character, temperament, or personality. The more it was written, the more it savored of deliberate plan and purpose, — in other words, the less it was the product of fate, race, or of anything local, individual, inevitable, — the more it pleased him. Art, and not nature, was his aspiration. And this view has more currency in Europe than in this country. In some extreme cases it becomes what one may fairly call the art disease. Baudelaire, for instance, as quoted by Tolstoi, expressed a preference for a painted woman's face over one showing its natural color, "and for metal trees and a theatrical imitation of water, rather than real trees and real water." Thus does an overweening passion for art degenerate into a love for the artificial for its own sake. In the cultivation of letters there seems always to be a danger that we shall come to value things not for their own sake, but for the literary effects that may be wrought out of them. The great artist,

I take it, is primarily in love with life and things, and not with art. On these terms alone is his work fresh and stimulating and filled with good arterial blood.

VI

Teaching literature is like teaching religion. You can give only the dry bones of the matter in either case. But the dry bones of theology are not religion, and the dry bones of rhetoric are not literature. The flesh-and-blood reality is alone of value, and this cannot be taught, it must be felt and experienced.

The class in literature studies an author's sentence-structure and paragraphing, and doubtless could tell the author more about it than he knows himself. The probabilities are that he never thought a moment about his sentence-structure or his paragraphing. He has thought only of his subject-matter and how to express himself clearly and forcibly; the structure of his sentences takes care of itself. From every art certain rules and principles may be deduced, but the intelligent apprehension of those rules and principles no more leads to mastery in that art, or even helps to mastery in it, than a knowledge of the anatomy and the vital processes of the stomach helps a man to digest his dinner, or than the knowledge of the gunsmith helps make a good marksman. In other words the science of

any art is of little use to him who would practice that art. To be a fiddler you must fiddle and see others fiddle; to be a painter you must paint and study the painting of others; to be a writer you must write and familiarize yourself with the works of the best authors. Studying an author from the outside by bringing the light of rhetoric to bear upon him is of little profit. We must get inside of him, and we can only get inside of him through sympathy and appreciation. There is only one way to teach literature, only one vital way, and that is by reading it. The laboratory way may give one the dry bones of the subject, but not the living thing itself. If the teacher, by his own living voice and an occasional word of comment, can bring out the soul of a work, he may help the student's appreciation of it; he may, in a measure, impart to him his own larger and more intelligent appreciation of it. And that is a true service.

Young men and young women actually go to college to take a course in Shakespeare or Chaucer or Dante or the Arthurian legends. The course becomes a mere knowledge course, as Professor Corson suggests. My own first acquaintance with Milton was through an exercise in grammar. We parsed "Paradise Lost." Much of the current college study of Shakespeare is little better than parsing him. The minds of the pupils are focused upon every word and line of the text, as the microscope is focused

upon a fly's foot in the laboratory. The class probably dissects a frog or a star-fish one day, and a great poet the next, and it does both in about the same spirit. It falls upon one of these great plays like hens upon a bone in winter: no meaning of word or phrase escapes it, every line is literally picked to pieces; but of the poet himself, of that which makes him what he is, his tremendous dramatic power, how much do the students get? Very little, I fear. They have had an intellectual exercise and not an emotional experience. They have added to their knowledge, but have not taken a step in culture. To dig into the roots and origins of the great poets is like digging into the roots of an oak or a maple, the better to increase your appreciation of the beauty of the tree. There stands the tree in all its summer glory; will you really know it any better after you have laid bare every root and rootlet? There stand Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer. Read them, give yourself to them, and master them if you are man enough. The poets are not to be analyzed, they are to be enjoyed; they are not to be studied, but to be loved; they are not for knowledge, but for culture — to enhance our appreciation of life and our mastery over its elements. All the mere facts about a poet's work are as chaff compared with the appreciation of one fine line or fine sentence. Why *study* a great poet at all after the manner of the dissecting-room? Why not rather seek to make

the acquaintance of his living soul and to feel its power?

The mere study of words, too, — of their origin and history, or of the relation of your own language to some other, — how little that avails! As little as a knowledge of the making and tempering of a sword would help a man to be a good swordsman. What avails in literature is a quick and delicate sense of the life and individuality of words — "a sense practiced as a blind man's touch," or as a musician's ear, so that the magic of the true style is at once felt and appreciated; this, and an equally quick and delicate sense of the life and individuality of things. "Is there any taste in the white of an egg?" No more is there in much merely correct writing. There is the use of language as the vehicle of knowledge, and there is the use of it as an instrument of the imagination. In Wordsworth's line,

> "The last to parley with the setting sun,"

in Whitman's sentence,

> "Oh, waves, I have fingered every shore with you,"

in Emerson's description of an Indian-summer day, "the day, immeasurably long, sleeps over the broad hills and warm, wide fields" — in these and such as these we see the imaginative use of words.

Most of the Dantean and Homeric and Shakespearean scholarship is the mere dust of time that

has accumulated upon these names. In the course of years it will accumulate upon Tennyson, and then we shall have Tennysonian scholars and learned dissertations upon some insignificant detail of his work. Think of the Shakespeareana with which literature is burdened! It is mostly mere shop litter and dust. In certain moods I think one may be pardoned for feeling that Shakespeare is fast becoming a curse to the human race. Of mere talk about him, it seems, there is to be no end. He has been the host of more literary parasites probably than any other name in history. He is edited and reëdited as if a cubit could be added to his stature by marginal notes and comments. On the contrary, the result is, for the most part, like a mere growth of underbrush that obscures the forest trees. The reader's attention is being constantly diverted from the main matter — he is being whipped in the face by insignificant twigs. Criticism may prune away what obscures a great author, but what shall we say when it obstructs the view of him by a multitude of unimportant questions?

The main aim of the teacher of literature should be to train and quicken the student's taste — his sense of the fitness and proportion of things — till he can detect the true from the false, or the excellent from the common. There is but one way to learn to detect the genuine from the counterfeit in any department of life, and that is by experience. Fa-

miliarize the student with the works of the real masters of literature and you have safeguarded him against the pretenders. After he has become acquainted with the look and the ring of the pure gold he is less likely to be imposed upon by the counterfeit. The end here indicated cannot be reached by analysis, or by a course in rhetoric and sentence-structure, or by a microscopical examination of the writer's vocabulary, but by direct sympathetic intercourse with the best literature, through the living voice, or through your own silent perusal of it. The great Dantean and Shakespearean scholar is usually the outcome of a mental habit that would make Dante and Shakespeare impossible.

So eminent a critic as Frederic Harrison is reported as praising this sentence from the new British author Maurice Hewlett: "In the milk of October dawns her calm brows had been dipped." The instructor in literature should be able to show his class why this is not good literature. The suggestion of brows dipped in milk is not a pleasant one. One cannot conceive of any brow the beauty of which would be enhanced by it, even by the milk of October dawns, if there were anything in October dawns that in the remotest way suggested milk. Mr. Hewlett is so in love with a crisp style that he describes his heroine as lying white and twisting on a couch, crisping and uncrisping her little hands.

Such things come from straining after novelty.

They proceed from an unripe taste. Men of real genius and power are at times guilty of such lapses, or go astray in quest of novel images. Walter Bagehot sometimes did. Writing of Sydney Smith, his rhetoric shows its teeth in this fashion: "Writers, like teeth, are divided into incisors and grinders; Sydney Smith was a molar. He did not run a long sharp argument into the interior of a question; he did not, in the common phrase, go deeply into it; but he kept it steadily under the contact of a strong, capable, jawlike understanding, pressing its surface, effacing its intricacies, grinding it down." Such a comparison has the merit of being vivid; it also has the demerit of an unworthy alliance, — it marries the noble and the ignoble. You cannot lift mastication up to the level of intellectual processes, and seriously to compare the two is to degrade the latter. Sydney Smith himself could not have been guilty of such bad taste.

Let me finish this chapter with a bit of prose from Ben Jonson.

"Some words are to be culled out for ornament and color, as we gather flowers to strow houses or make garlands; but they are better when they grow to our style; as in a meadow where, though the mere grass and greenness delight, yet the variety of flowers doth heighten and beautify."

II

ANALOGY — TRUE AND FALSE

I HAVE never seen any thorough examination of the grounds of analogy. The works on logic make but slight reference to them, yet the argument from analogy is one of the most frequent forms of argument, and one of the most convincing. It is so much easier to captivate the fancy with a pretty or striking figure than to move the judgment with sound reasons, — so much easier to be rhetorical than to be logical.

We say that seeing is believing; the rhetorician makes us see the thing; his picture appeals to the mind's visual sense, hence his power over us, though his analogies are more apt to be false than true. We love to see these agreements between thoughts and things, or between the subjective and the objective worlds, and a favorite thought with profound minds in all ages has been the identity or oneness which runs through creation.

"A vast similitude interlocks all," says Whitman, "spans all the objects of the universe and compactly holds and encloses them."

Everywhere in Nature Emerson said he saw the

figure of a disguised man. The method of the universe is intelligible to us because it is akin to our own minds. Our minds are rather akin to it and are derived from it. Emerson made much of this thought. The truth here indicated is undoubtedly the basis of all true analogy — this unity, this oneness of creation; but the analogies that "are constant and pervade Nature" are probably not so numerous as Emerson seemed to fancy. Thus one can hardly agree with him that there is "intent" of analogy between man's life and the seasons, because the seasons are not a universal fact of the globe, and man's life is. The four seasons are well defined in New England, but not in Ecuador.

The agreement of appearances is one thing, the identity of law and essence is another, and the agreement of man's life with the seasons must be considered accidental rather than intentional.

Language is full of symbols. We make the world without a symbol of the world within. We describe thoughts, and emotions, in the terms of an objective experience. Things furnish the moulds in which our ideas are cast. Size, proportion, mass, vista, vastness, height, depth, darkness, light, coarse, fine, centre, surface, order, chaos, and a thousand other terms, we apply alike to the world without and to the world within. We know a higher temperance than concerns the body, a finer digestion and assimilation than go on in it.

Our daily conversation is full of pictures and parables, or the emblematic use of things. From life looked at as a voyage, we get the symbolic use of anchor, compass, pole-star, helm, haven; from life considered as a battle, we read deep meanings in shield, armor, fencing, captain, citadel, panic, onset. Life regarded under the figure of husbandry gives us the expressive symbols of seedtime and harvest, planting and watering, tares and brambles, pruning and training, the chaff and the wheat. We talk in parables when we little suspect it. What various applications we make of such words as dregs, gutter, eclipse, satellite, hunger, thirst, kindle, brazen, echo, and hundreds of others. We speak of the reins of government, the sinews of war, the seeds of rebellion, the morning of youth, the evening of age, a flood of emotion, the torch of truth, burning with resentment, the veil of secrecy, the foundations of character, a ripple of laughter, incrusted dogmas, corrosive criticism. We say his spirits drooped, his mind soared, his heart softened, his brow darkened, his reputation was stabbed, he clinched his argument. We say his course was beset with pitfalls, his efforts were crowned with success, his eloquence was a torrent that carried all before it, and so on.

Burke calls attention to the metaphors that are taken from the sense of taste, as a sour temper, bitter curses, bitter fate; and, on the other hand, a sweet person, a sweet experience, and the like.

Other epithets are derived from the sense of touch, as a soft answer, a polished character, a cold reception, a sharp retort, a hard problem; or from the sense of sight, as brilliant, dazzling, color, light, shade; others from our sense of hearing, as discordant, echoing, reverberating, booming, grumbling. All trades, pursuits, occupations, furnish types or symbols for the mind. The word "whitewash" has become a very useful one, especially to political parties. Thoreau said he would not be as one who drives a nail into mere lath and plaster. Even the railroad has contributed useful terms, as side-tracked, down brakes, the red flag, way station, etc. Great men are like through trains that connect far-distant points; others are merely locals. From the builder we get the effective phrase and idea of scaffolding. So much in the world is mere scaffolding, so much in society is mere varnish and veneer. Life is said to have its "seamy side." The lever and the fulcrum have their supersensuous uses. The chemist with his solvents, precipitants, crystallizations, attractions, and repulsions, and the natural philosopher with his statics and dynamics and his correlation of forces, have enlarged our powers of expression. The strata of the geologist furnish useful symbols. What a significant symbol is afforded by the wave! There is much in life, in history, and in all nature that is typified by it. We have cold waves and hot waves, and in the spring and fall migrations

of the birds we have "bird waves." Earthquake shocks go in waves and circles; how often our views and conceptions of things are expressed by the circle! It is a symbol of most profound meaning. It helps us to understand how the universe is finally inexplicable; that there is neither beginning nor end, and that it retreats forever into itself.

We speak of currents of thought, of opinion, of influence, and of tides in the affairs of men. We can conceive of these things under no better figure. Fire and all that pertains to it give us symbols, as heat, light, flame, sparks, smoke.

The words juicy, unctuous, fluid, have obvious appropriateness when applied to the mind and its products. Running water gives us the delightful epithets limpid and lucid. Youth is plastic, ductile, impressible — neither the mind nor the body has yet hardened. The analogy is vital. A habit gets deeper and deeper hold of us; we fall into a rut — these figures convey the exact truth.

When used as a symbol how expressive is the dawn, the twilight, the sunset! The likeness is not accidental but fundamental.

The calm that comes after the storm in human life as in nature — how true the analogy. To give vent to things, how significant. To give vent to angry feelings in words, how like giving vent to smothered fire; or to any suppressed and confined force: the words come faster and hotter, the passion

of anger mounts and there is a "blow out" indeed. Deny yourself the first word, and the conflagration is avoided. A passion can be smothered as literally as a fire.

The use of metaphor, comparison, analogy is twofold — to enliven and to convince; to illustrate and enforce an accepted truth, and to press home and clinch one in dispute. An apt figure will put a new face upon an old and much worn truism, and a vital analogy may reach and move the reason. Thus when Renan, referring to the decay of the old religious beliefs, says that people are no poorer for being robbed of false bank notes and bogus shares, his comparison has a logical validity, — as has also Herbert Spencer's figure when he says, "The illusion that great men and great events came oftener in early times than now is partly due to historical perspective. As in a range of equidistant columns the farthest off look the closest, so the conspicuous objects of the past seem more thickly clustered the more remote they are." We seem to see the identity of law in both these cases. We are treated to a pictorial argument.

We are using analogy in a legitimate and forceful way when we speak of our fund or capital of bodily health and strength, and of squandering or impairing it, or of investing it poorly.

The accidental analogies or likenesses are limitless and are the great stock in trade of most writers

and speakers. They tickle the fancy and enliven the page or the discourse. But essential analogies, or those that spring from unity of law, are more rare. These have the force of logic; they shed a steady light.

St. Paul's famous comparison of the body dead and buried with the seed in the soil, which, he says, dies before it can grow, is used with logical intent. But will it bear examination? Is the germinating seed dead in any sense that the body is dead? It is no more dead than the egg buried beneath the mother hen is dead. When the egg really dies we know the result, as we know the result when the corn rots in the ground. It is not dissolution that the seed experiences, but evolution. The illustration of the eloquent apostle may captivate the fancy, but as argument designed to convince the understanding it has no force.

There might be force in the argument for immortality drawn from the metamorphosis of the grub into the butterfly, if the chrysalis really were a shroud and held a dead body. But it is not, any more than an egg is; it is quick, and capable of movement. The analogy between it and the dead body will not hold. A much more sound analogy, based upon the chrysalis, is that which takes it as the type of a mind or soul undeveloped, — slumbering, gestating, — and the winged creature as the developed, emancipated mind.

Analogy means an agreement of relations or an equality of ratios.

When we speak of the body as a tenement and the soul as the tenant, we mean or aver that the relation of the soul to the body is the same as that of the man to the house he occupies. In either case the occupant can move out or in, and is entirely distinct from the structure that shelters him. But if we know anything about the relations of the mind and the body, we know that they are not like this; we know that they are not truthfully expressed in this comparison.

Bishop Butler's "analogy from nature," upon which he built his famous work, will not any better bear close examination. What analogy is there between death and sleep or a swoon? what agreement of ratios? The resemblance is entirely superficial. Or how can we predict another sphere of existence for man because another sphere awaits the unborn infant? But another sphere does not await the unborn infant; only new and different relations to the same physical sphere. An embryo implies a future; but what is there embryonic about the mature man?

This breakdown of Butler's argument in regard to a future life was pointed out by Matthew Arnold; the very point in dispute, namely, a future life, is assumed. If there is a future life, if there is another world, it doubtless bears some analogy to this. In like manner, if there are fairies and nymphs and

demigods, it is not improbable to suppose that they bear some resemblance to human beings, but shall we assume their actual existence upon such a probability?

That the unborn child starting as a bit of protoplasmic jelly should become a man, a Napoleon, or a Shakespeare, may be quite as startling a fact as the assumption of a future existence; yet the former is a matter of experience, which lends no color to the truth of the latter. It is not a matter of reason that babes become men, but a matter of observation and experience. Indeed, in Butler's famous argument, the analogy of nature is everywhere forced and falsified. In every case he puts the words into her mouth that he would have her speak. His faith supplies him with the belief in a future life, and in a moral governor of the universe, and then he seeks to confirm or to demonstrate the truth of this faith by an appeal to the analogy of nature.

Out of this whirling, seething, bubbling universe of warring and clashing forces man has emerged. How impossible it all seems to reason! Experience alone tells us that it is true. Upon the past history of the earth and of the race of man we may predict astonishing changes and transformations for the future of both, because the continuity of cause and effect is not broken; but the perpetuity of the "me" and the "you" is not implied. All that is implied is the perpetuity of the sum of physical forces. But

as to the future of the individual, standing upon the past or upon the present, what are we safe in affirming? Only this — that as we had a beginning we shall have an ending; that as yesterday we were not, so to-morrow we shall not be. A man is like the electric spark that glows and crackles for an instant between two dark, silent, inscrutable eternities. The fluid is not lost, but that tiny bolt has come and gone. Darkness and silence before; darkness and silence after. I do not say this is the summing up of the whole question of immortality. I only mean to say that this is where the argument from analogy lands us.

We can argue from the known to the unknown in a restricted way. We do this in life and in science continually. We do not know that the fixed stars have worlds revolving about them; yet the presumption, based upon our own solar system, is that they have. But could we infer other suns, from the existence of our own, were no others visible? Could we predict the future of the earth did we not know its past, or read aright its past did we not know its present state? From an arc we can complete a circle. We can read the big in the little. The motion of a top throws light upon the motion of the earth. An ingenious mind finds types everywhere, but real analogies are not so common.

The likeness of one thing with another may be valid and real, but the likeness of a thought with a

thing is often merely fanciful. We very frequently unconsciously counterfeit external objects and laws in the region of mind and morals. Out of a physical fact or condition we fabricate a mental or spiritual condition or experience to correspond. Thus a current journal takes the fact that the sun obscures but does not put out the light of the moon and the stars, and from it draws the inference that the light of science may dim but cannot blot out the objects of faith It counterfeits this fact and seeks to give it equal force and value in the spiritual realm. The objects of faith may be as real and as unquenchable as the stars, but this is the very point in dispute, and the analogy used assumes the thing to be proved. If the objects of faith are real, then the light of science will not put them out any more than the sun puts out the stars; but the fact that the stars are there, notwithstanding the sunlight, proves nothing with regard to the reality of the objects of faith. The only real analogy that exists in the case is between the darkness and the daylight of the world within and the darkness and the daylight of the world without. Science, or knowledge, is light; ignorance is darkness; there are no other symbols that so fully and exactly express these things. The mind sees, science lets in the light, and the darkness flees.

If there is anything in our inward life and experience that corresponds or is analogous to the night with its stars, it is to be found in that withdrawal

from the noise and bustle of the world into the atmosphere of secluded contemplation. If there are any stars in your firmament, you will find them then. But, after all, how far the stars of religion and philosophy are subjective, or of our own creation, is always a question.

I recently met with the same fallacy in a leading article in one of the magazines. "The fact revealed by the spectroscope," says the writer, "that the physical elements of the earth exist also in the stars, supports the faith that a moral nature like our own inhabits the universe." A tremendous leap — a leap from the physical to the moral. We know that these earth elements are found in the stars by actual observation and experience. We see them as truly as we see the stars themselves; but a moral nature like our own — this is assumed and is not supported at all by analogy. The only legitimate inference from the analogy is, that as our sun has planets and that these planets, or one of them at least, is the abode of life, so these other suns in composition like our own, and governed by laws like our own, have planets revolving around them which are or may be the abode of beings like ourselves. If this "moral nature like our own" pervades our system, then the inference is just that it also pervades the other systems. But to argue from physical elements to moral causes is to throw upon analogy more than it will bear.

Analogy is a kind of rule of three: we must have three terms to find the fourth. We argue from the past to the present and from the present to the future. Things that begin must end. If man's life has been continuous in the past, then we may infer that it will be continuous in the future.

Our earth has a moon; it is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that some of the other planets have moons. It is reasonable to suppose that there are other planets and suns and systems, myriads of them. It may be reasonable to think with Sir Robert Ball that the extinct or dark and burnt-out bodies in the sky exceed in numbers the luminous ones, as the non-luminous bodies exceed the luminous ones upon the earth. No man has seen live steam; when it can be seen it is dead; yet we know that it exists.

We may complete a circle from a small segment of it. If we have two sides of a triangle, we may add the third. To find the value of an unknown quantity, we must have a complete equation and as many equations as we have unknown quantities. We can argue from this life to the future life only after proof that there is a future life.

Professor Drummond was able to show the continuity of natural law in the spiritual world by assuming that a spiritual world which was the counterpart of the physical world actually existed. That Calvinism in its main tenets tallies, or seems to tally, with science is no more proof of the literal

truth of those tenets than the ascribing of human form and features to the man in the moon is proof of the existence of such a man. Our minds, our spirits, are no doubt in a way under the same law as are our bodies, because they are the outcome of our bodies and our bodies are the outcome of material nature; but to base upon that fact the existence of a corresponding world and life after death is to leap beyond the bounds of all possible analogy.

Many of the dogmas of theology have a grain of natural truth in them. This does not prove their truth, as applicable to some hypothetical other world, but as applied to this world. The kingdom of heaven, as the founder of Christianity taught, is not yonder and of to-morrow, but is now and here.

Tolstoi, I think, is guilty of false analogy when, in attempting to get rid of the idea of pleasure as the aim and purpose of art, he makes the comparison with food, and says that pleasure is no more the end in eating than it is in painting, or poetry, or music. The analogy is false because the necessities of our bodies are not to be compared with the luxuries, so to speak, of our minds. We cannot live without food, but we can and do live without art. And yet, do we not eat because the food tastes good? Is not the satisfaction of appetite the prime motive in eating? If dining gave us no pleasure, we should probably soon learn to swallow our food in a highly concentrated form, in capsules, and thus make short

work of it. Nature, of course, conceals her own purpose in the pleasure we take in our food, just as she does in the pleasure of the sexes; but of this purpose we take little thought, except in the latter case how to defeat it. We do not have conscious pleasure in breathing; hence our breathing is involuntary. We do have conscious pleasure in food; hence our elaborate and ingenious cookery — often to the detriment of our bodies. Take away the pleasures of life, the innocent natural pleasure, take away the pleasures of art, and few of us would care for either.

Man is a microcosm, an epitome of the universe, and its laws and processes are repeated dimly or plainly in him. Then there are, of course, real analogies and homologies between different parts of nature, as between fluids and gases, and fluids and solids, between the organic and the inorganic, between the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms.

When we strike the great vital currents or laws, — the law of growth, of decay, of health and disease, of reproduction, of evolution, — we strike the region of true analogy. These laws must be continuous throughout nature. All phases of development must be analogous. The mind grows with the body and is under the same law. Exercise is the same to both. Each has its appetites. Each has its tonics and stimulants. All beginnings are the same; that is, from a germ. Language must have begun in the most rudimentary sounds. Art, we know, began in

the most rude and simple marks and signs; science in the crudest, simplest facts; religion in childish superstition; and so on through the whole scope of human development. Development is always from the simple to the complex.

There is, no doubt, a deep-seated analogy between the growth of the individual and the growth of the state or nation; between revolutions in history, and storms and convulsions in nature.

We speak of the root of the matter; everything really has its root, its obscure beginning, its hidden underground processes.

There are types and suggestions everywhere — fresh fuel checks the fire; the soft stone cuts the steel the fastest; the first big drops of the shower raise the dust.

The analogy between the development of animal life upon the earth and the growth of organized communities seems complete. In the lower forms of life, there is no specialization, or division of functions. The amœba can move, feel, digest, reproduce in every part of its structure; it is not differentiated or specialized; so in the rudest tribes, there is little division of labor. As animal life develops, each part of the body has a function of its own; and as communities develop, extreme specialization takes place. Organic life goes from the simple to the complex, as does progress in human affairs. This is the law of all growth.

When Schopenhauer says "riches are like sea water; the more you drink the thirstier you become," the mind is instantly pleased by the force and aptness of the comparison, and for the moment we look upon riches as something to be avoided. But is the analogy entirely true? Sea water is to be avoided altogether, even a single mouthful of it; but even Schopenhauer defends riches and the pursuit of riches. "People are often reproached for wishing for money above all things, and for loving it more than anything else; but it is natural and even inevitable for people to love that which, like an unwearied Proteus, is always ready to turn itself into whatever object their wandering wishes or manifold desires may for the moment fix upon." Here the comparison will bear a closer scrutiny. Wealth is indeed a Proteus that will take any form your fancy may choose. "Other things are only relatively good," the great pessimist further says; "money alone is absolutely good, because it is not only a concrete satisfaction of one need in particular; it is an abstract satisfaction of all." What, then, becomes of its analogy to sea water, which so mocks and inflames our thirst? Even the resemblance in the one particular that Schopenhauer had in mind is not true. To the great majority of people wealth brings a degree of satisfaction; they give over its pursuit and seek the enjoyment of it. When a man enters into the race for wealth, he is unflagging in

seeking it as long as his cup of life is full; but when the limits of his powers are reached, he begins to lose interest, and the appetite for gold, as for other things, declines.

When the same philosopher says that to measure a man's happiness only by what he gets, and not also by what he expects to get, is as futile as to try to express a fraction which shall have a numerator but no denominator, he uses a figure that conveys the truth much more fully. It may be open to the objection of being too technical, but it expresses a real relation for all that. When you increase your expectations, you increase your denominator; and as most men expect or want more than they have, human happiness is nearly always a fraction — rarely is it a whole number. With many it is a very small fraction indeed. Blessed is he who expects little. The man who expects ten and gets but five is more to be envied than he who expects a thousand and gets but fifty. He is nearer the sum of his wishes. Hence the truth of the old saying that it is our wants that make us poor. When a piece of good fortune that he did not expect comes to a man, his happiness or satisfaction is no longer a fraction; it is more than a unit.

Quintilian says that the early blossom of talent is rarely followed by the fruit of great achievement, but the early works of a man or a youth are just as much fruit as his later ones. There is really no analogy

between the early works of an author and the blossoms of a tree. The dreams, the visions, the aspirations of youth are more like blossoms. Probably no great man has been without them; but how they wither and fall, and how much more sober the aspect which life puts on before any solid achievements can be pointed to! There is usually something more fresh and pristine about the earlier works of a man — more buoyancy, more unction, more of the "fluid and attaching character;" but the ripest wisdom always goes with age.

There are, no doubt, many strict and striking analogies between the mind and the body, their growth and decay, their health and disease, their assimilative, digestive, and reproductive processes.

The mind is only a finer body. It is hardly a figure of speech to speak of wounded feelings, of a wounded spirit. How acute at first, and how surely healing with time. But the scar remains. Then there are real analogies, real parallels, between the mind and outward nature, in the laws of growth and decay, nutrition and reproduction. "The mind of Otho," says Tacitus, "was not, like his body, soft and effeminate." There are minds that are best described by the word masculine, and others by the word feminine. There are dull, sluggish minds, just as there are heavy, sluggish bodies, and the two usually go together. There are dry, lean minds, and there are minds full of unction and juice. We

even use the phrase "mental dyspepsia," but the analogy here implied is probably purely fanciful, though mental dissipation and mental intemperance are no idle words. Some persons acquire the same craze for highly exciting and stimulating mental food that others have for strong drink, or for pepper and other condiments. They lose their taste for simple, natural, healthful things, — for good sound literature, — and crave sensational novels and the Sunday newspapers. Doubtless a large part of the reading of the American people to-day is sheer mental dissipation, and is directed by an abnormal craving for mental excitement. There is degeneration in the physical world, and there is degeneration, strictly so called, in the intellectual world. There are proportion, relation, cause and effect, health and disease, in one as in the other. Logic is but the natural relation of parts as we see them in the organic world. In fact, logic is but health and proportion. The mind cannot fly any more than the body can; it progresses from one fact or consideration to another, step by step, though often, or perhaps generally, we are not conscious of the steps. A large view of truth may be suddenly revealed to the mind, as of a landscape from a hill-top; but the mind did not fly to the vantage ground; it reached it by a slow and maybe obscure process.

The world is simpler than we think. The modes

and processes of things widely dissimilar are more likely to be identical than we suspect. There are homologies where we see apparent contradiction. There is but one protoplasm for animal and vegetable. A little more or less heat makes the gaseous, makes the liquid, makes the solid. Lava crystallizes or freezes at a high temperature; water, at a low one; mercury, at a still lower. Charcoal and the diamond are one; the same law of gravitation which makes the cloud float makes the rain fall. The law that spheres a tear spheres a globe. These facts warrant us in looking for real homologies, vital correspondences, in nature. Only such correspondences give logical and scientific value to analogy. If the likeness means identity of law, or is the same principle in another disguise, then it is an instrument of truth. We might expect to find many analogies between air and water, the atmosphere being but a finer ocean; also between ice and water, and between ice and the stratified rocks. If water flows, then will ice flow; if ice bends, then will the rocky strata bend. If cross fertilization is good in the vegetable world, we should expect to find it good in the animal world.

There is thought to be a strict analogy between the succession of plants in different months of the year and the prevalence of different diseases at different seasons. The germ theory of disease gives force to the comparison. The different species of

germs no doubt find some periods of the year more favorable to their development than others.

If on this planet men walk about while trees are rooted to the ground, we may reasonably expect that the same is true — provided that on them there are men and trees — of all other planets. If the law of variation, and the survival of the fittest, are the laws of one species, then they will prove to be the laws of all. The bud is a kind of seed; the fruit is a kind of leaf. High culture has the same effect upon man and animals that it has upon plants, — it lessens the powers of reproduction. The lowest organisms multiply by myriads; the higher barely keep from retrograding. A wild apple is full of seeds; in a choice pippin the seeds are largely abortive. Indeed, all weeds and parasites seem bent on filling the world with their progeny, while the higher forms fall off and tend to extinction. Such agreements and correspondences point to identity of law. The analogy is vital.

In the animal economy there are analogies with outward nature. Thus respiration is a kind of combustion. Life itself is a kind of fire which goes out when it has no fuel to feed upon. The foliage of a tree has functions like those of the lungs of an animal. Darwin has noted the sleep of plants and their diurnal motions. Dr. Holmes had a bold fancy that trees are animals, with their tails in the air and their heads in the ground; but there is nothing in the

trunk and branches of a tree analogous to a tail, though there is a sort of rudimentary intelligence in the root, as Darwin has shown. We use the tree as a symbol of the branching of a family; hence the family tree. But the analogy is not a true one. The branches of a family multiply and diverge when traced backward the same as forward. You had two parents, they had four, these four had eight, and so on. If the human race sprang from one pair, then are its branchings more a kind of network, an endless multiplication of meshes. All the past appears to centre in you, and all the future to spring from you. We get the family tree only by cutting out a fragment of this network.

There is little doubt that certain natural laws pervade alike both mind and matter. The law of evolution is universally operative, and is the key to development in the moral and intellectual world no less than in the physical. We are probably, in all our thoughts and purposes, much more under the dominion of universal natural laws than we suspect. The will reaches but a little way. I have no doubt that the race of man bears a definite relation to the life of the globe, — that is, to its age, its store of vitality; that it will culminate as the vital power of the earth culminates, and decline as it declines. Like man, the earth has had its youth, — its nebulous, fiery, molten youth; then its turbulent, luxuriant, copious, riotous middle period; then its placid,

temperate, ripe later age, when the higher forms emerge upon the scene. The analogy is deep and radical. The vital energy of the globe was once much more rampant and overflowing than it is now; the time will come when the pulse of the planet will be much feebler than it is now. Youth and age, growth and decay, are universal conditions. The heavens themselves shall wax old as doth a garment. Life and death are universal conditions, and to fancy a place where death is not is to fancy one's self entirely outside of this universe and of all possible universes.

Men in communities and assemblages are under laws that do not reach or affect the single individual, just as vast bodies of water respond to attractions and planetary perturbations that do not affect the lesser bodies. Men kindle one another as do firebrands, and beget a collective heat and an enthusiasm that tyrannize over the individual purposes and wills. We say things are in the air, that a spirit is abroad; that is, that influences are at work above the wills and below the consciousness of the people. There are changes or movements in the world and in the communities that seem strictly analogous to drifting; it is as when a ship is carried out of its course by unsuspected currents, or as when arctic explorers, with their faces set northward, are unconsciously carried in the opposite direction by the ice floe beneath them. The spirit of the age, or the time-

spirit, is always at work, and takes us with it whether we know it or not. For instance, the whole religious world is now drifting away from the old theology, and drifting faster than we suspect. Certain zealots have their faces very strongly set against it, but, like Commodore Parry on the ice floe, they are going south faster than their efforts are carrying them north. Indeed, the whole sentiment of the race is moving into a more genial and temperate theological climate, away from purgatorial fires rather than toward them.

The political sentiment of a country also drifts. That of our own may be said to have been drifting for some time now in the direction of freer commercial intercourse with other nations.

A man's life may stagnate as literally as water may stagnate, and just as motion and direction are the remedy for one, so purpose and activity are the remedy for the other. Movement is the condition of life, anyway. Set the currents going in the air, in the water, in the body, in the mind, in the community, and a healthier condition will follow. Change, diversity, activity, are the prime conditions of life and health everywhere. Persons with doubts and perplexities about life go to work to ameliorate some of its conditions, and their doubts and perplexities vanish — not because their problems are solved, as they think they are, but because their energies have found an outlet, the currents have been set going.

Persons of strong will have few doubts and uncertainties. They do not solve the problems, but they break the spell of their enchantment. Nothing relieves and ventilates the mind like a resolution.

A true work of art is analogous to a living organism. "The essential condition of art creations," says Renan, "is to form a living system every portion of which answers and demands every other. . . . The intimate laws of life, of the development of organic products, and of the toning down of shades must be considered at every step." Works such as certain of Victor Hugo's, which have no organic unity and proportion, are, according to this dictum, monstrosities.

When Matthew Arnold insisted upon it that in all vital prose there is a process of evolution, he enunciated the same principle as did Renan. We all know well that which is organic in books as distinguished from the inorganic, the vital as distinguished from the mechanical. Read the learned address of the president of some local scientific or literary society, and then turn to one of Professor Huxley's trenchant papers. The difference is just that between weapons in an armory and weapons in the hands of trained soldiers. Huxley's will and purpose, or his personality, pervade and vitalize his material and make it his own, while the learned president sustains only an accidental and mechanical relation to what he has to say. Happy is the writer

who can lop off or cut out from his page everything to which he sustains only a secondary and mechanical relation.

The summing up of the matter would then seem to be, that there is an analogy of rhetoric and an analogy of science; a likeness that is momentary and accidental, giving rise to metaphor and parable; and a correspondence that is fundamental, arising from the universality of law.

III

STYLE AND THE MAN

I

THE difference between a precious stone and a common stone is not an essential difference — not a difference of substance, but of arrangement of the particles — the crystallization. In substance charcoal and the diamond are one, but in form and effect how widely they differ. The pearl contains nothing that is not found in the coarsest oyster shell.

Two men have the same thoughts; they use about the same words in expressing them; yet with one the product is real literature, with the other it is a platitude.

The difference is all in the presentation; a finer and more compendious process has gone on in the one case than in the other. The elements are better fused and welded together; they are in some way heightened and intensified. Is not here a clue to what we mean by style? Style transforms common quartz into an Egyptian pebble. We are apt to think of style as something external, that can be put on, something in and of itself. But it is not; it is in the

inmost texture of the substance. Choice words, faultless rhetoric, polished periods, are only the accidents of style. Indeed, perfect workmanship is one thing; style, as the great writers have it, is quite another. It may, and often does, go with faulty workmanship. It is the use of words in a fresh and vital way, so as to give us a vivid sense of a new spiritual force and personality. In the best work the style is found and hidden in the matter.

If a writer does not bring a new thought, he must at least bring a new quality, — he must give a fresh, new flavor to the old thoughts. Style or quality will keep a man's work alive whose thought is essentially commonplace, as is the case with Addison; and Arnold justly observes of the poet Gray that his gift of style doubles his force and "raises him to a rank beyond what his natural richness and power seem to warrant."

There is the correct, conventional, respectable and scholarly use of language of the mass of writers, and there is the fresh, stimulating, quickening use of it of the man of genius. How apt and racy and telling is often the language of unlettered persons; the born writer carries this same gift into a higher sphere. There is a passage in one of Emerson's early letters, written when he was but twenty-four, and given by Mr. Cabot in his Memoir, which shows how clearly at that age Emerson discerned the secret of good writing and good preaching.

"I preach half of every Sunday. When I attended church on the other half of a Sunday, and the image in the pulpit was all of clay, and not of tunable metal, I said to myself that if men would avoid that general language and general manner in which they strive to hide all that is peculiar, and would say only what is uppermost in their own minds, after their own individual manner, every man would be interesting. . . . But whatever properties a man of narrow intellect feels to be peculiar he studiously hides; he is ashamed or afraid of himself, and all his communications to men are unskillful plagiarisms from the common stock of thought and knowledge, and he is of course flat and tiresome."

The great mass of the writing and sermonizing of any age is of the kind here indicated; it is the result of the machinery of culture and of books and the schools put into successful operation. But now and then a man appears whose writing is vital; his page may be homely, but it is alive; it is full of personal magnetism. The writer does not merely give us what he thinks or knows; he gives us himself. There is nothing secondary or artificial between himself and his reader. It is books of this kind that mankind does not willingly let die. Some minds are like an open fire, — how direct and instant our communication with them; how they interest us; there are no screens or disguises; we see and feel the vital play of their thought; we are face to face with their

spirits. Indeed all good literature, whether poetry or prose, is the open fire; there is directness, reality, charm; we get something at first-hand that warms and stimulates.

In literature proper our interest, I think, is always in the writer himself, — his quality, his personality, his point of view. We may fancy that we care only for the subject-matter; but the born writer makes any subject interesting to us by his treatment of it or by the personal element he infuses into it. When our concern is primarily with the subject-matter, with the fact or the argument, or with the information conveyed, then we are not dealing with literature in the strict sense. It is not so much what the writer tells us that makes literature, as the way he tells it; or rather, it is the degree in which he imparts to it some rare personal quality or charm that is the gift of his own spirit, something which cannot be detached from the work itself, and which is as inherent as the sheen of a bird's plumage, as the texture of a flower's petal. There is this analogy in nature. The hive bee does not get honey from the flowers; honey is a product of the bee. What she gets from the flowers is mainly sweet water or nectar; this she puts through a process of her own, and to it adds a minute drop of her own secretion, formic acid. It is her special personal contribution that converts the nectar into honey.

In the work of the literary artist, common facts

and experiences are changed and heightened in the same way. Sainte-Beuve, speaking of certain parts of Rousseau's "Confessions," says, "Such pages were, in French literature, the discovery of a new world, a world of sunshine and of freshness, which men had near them without having perceived it." They had not perceived it because they had not had Rousseau's mind to mirror it for them. The sunshine and the freshness were a gift of his spirit. The new world was the old world in a new light. What charmed them was a quality personal to Rousseau. Nature they had always had, but not the Rousseau sensibility to nature. The same may be said of more recent writers upon outdoor themes. Readers fancy that in the works of Thoreau or of Jefferies some new charm or quality of nature is disclosed, that something hidden in field or wood is brought to light. They do not see that what they are in love with is the mind or spirit of the writer himself. Thoreau does not interpret nature, but nature interprets him. The new thing disclosed in bird and flower is simply a new sensibility to these objects in the beholder. In morals and ethics the same thing is true. Let an essayist like Dr. Johnson or Arthur Helps state a principle or an idea and it has a certain value; let an essayist like Ruskin or Emerson or Carlyle state the same principle and it has an entirely different value, makes an entirely different impression, -- the qualities of mind and character of these writers are

so different. The reader's relation with them is much more intimate and personal.

It is quality of mind which makes the writings of Burke rank above those of Gladstone, Ruskin's criticism above that of Hamerton, Froude's histories above Freeman's, Renan's "Life of Jesus" above that of Strauss; which makes the pages of Goethe, Coleridge, Lamb, literature in a sense that the works of many able minds are not. These men impart something personal and distinctive to the language they use. They make the words their own. The literary quality is not something put on. It is not of the hand, it is of the mind; it is not of the mind, but of the soul; it is of whatever is most vital and characteristic in the writer. It is confined to no particular manner and to no particular matter. It may be the gift of writers of widely different manners — of Carlyle as well as of Arnold; and in men of similar manners, one may have it and the other may not. It is as subtle as the tone of the voice or the glance of the eye. Quality is the one thing in life that cannot be analyzed, and it is the one thing in art that cannot be imitated. A man's manner may be copied, but his style, his charm, his real value, can only be parodied. In the conscious or unconscious imitations of the major poets by the minor, we get only a suggestion of the manner of the former; their essential quality cannot be reproduced.

English literature is full of imitations of the Greek poets, but that which the Greek poets did not and could not borrow they cannot lend; their quality stays with them. The charm of spoken discourse is largely in the personal quality of the speaker — something intangible to print. When we see the thing in print, we wonder how it could so have charmed or moved us. To convey this charm, this aroma of the man, to the written discourse is the triumph of style. A recent French critic says of Madame de Staël that she had no style; she wrote just as she thought, but without being able to impart to her writing the living quality of her speech. It is not importance of subject-matter that makes a work great, but importance of the subjectivity of the writer, — a great mind, a great soul, a great personality. A work that bears the imprint of these, that is charged with the life and power of these, which it gives forth again under pressure, is alone entitled to high rank.

All pure literature is the revelation of a man. In a work of true literary art the subject-matter has been so interpenetrated and vitalized by the spirit or personality of the writer, has become so thoroughly identified with it, that the two are one and inseparable, and the style *is* the man. Works in which this blending and identification, through emotion or imagination, of the author with his subject has not taken place, or has taken place imperfectly,

do not belong to pure literature. They may serve a useful purpose; but all *useful* purposes, in the strict sense, are foreign to those of art, which means foreign to the spirit that would live in the whole, that would live in the years and not in the days, in time and not in the hour. The true literary artist gives you of the substance of his mind; not merely his thought or his philosophy, but something more intimate and personal than that. It is not a tangible object passed from his hand to yours; it is much more like a transfusion of blood from his veins to yours. Montaigne gives us Montaigne, — the most delightfully garrulous man in literature. "These are fancies of my own," he says, "by which I do not pretend to discover things, but to lay open myself." "Cut these sentences," says Emerson, "and they bleed." Matthew Arnold denied that Emerson was a great writer; but we cannot account for the charm and influence of his works, it seems to me, on any other theory than that he has at least this mark of the great writer: he gives his reader of his own substance, he saturates his page with the high and rare quality of his own spirit. Everything he published has a distinct literary value, as distinguished from its moral or religious value. The same may be said of Arnold himself: else we should not care much for him. It is a particular and interesting type of man that speaks and breathes in every sentence; his style is vital in his matter, and is no more sepa-

rable from it than the style of silver or of gold is separable from those metals.

In such a writer as Lecky on the other hand, or as Mill or Spencer, one does not get this same subtle individual flavor; the work is more external, more the product of certain special faculties, as the reason, the memory, the understanding; and the personality of the author is not so intimately involved. But in the writer with the creative touch, whether he be poet, novelist, historian, critic, essayist, the chief factor in the product is always his own personality.

Style, then, in the sense in which I am here using the term, implies that vital, intimate, personal relation of the man to his language by which he makes the words his own, fills them with his own quality, and gives the reader that lively sense of being in direct communication with a living, breathing, mental and spiritual force. The writer who appears to wield his language as an instrument or a tool, something exterior to himself, who makes you conscious of his vocabulary, or whose words are the garments and not the tissue of his thought, has not style in this sense. "Style," says Schopenhauer, "is the physiognomy of the mind, and a safer index to character than the face." This definition is as good as any, and better than most, because it implies that identification of words with thoughts, of the man with his subject, which is the secret of a living style.

Hence the man who imitates another wears a mask, as does the man who writes in a language to which he was not born.

II

It has been said that novel-writing is a much finer art in our day than it was in the time of Scott, or of Dickens and Thackeray, — finer, I think, because it is in the hands of finer-strung, more daintily equipped men; but would one dare to say it is a greater art? One may admit all that is charged about Scott's want of style, his diffuseness and cumbrousness, and his tedious descriptions, and still justly claim for him the highest literary honors. He was a great nature, as Goethe said, and we come into vital contact with that great nature in his romances. He was not deficient in the larger art that knows how to make a bygone age live again to the imagination. He himself seems to have deprecated his "big bow-wow" style in comparison with the exquisite touches of Jane Austen. But no fineness of workmanship, no deftness of handling, can make up for the want of a large, rich, copious human endowment. I think we need to remember this when we compare unfavorably such men as Dickens and Thackeray with the cleverer artists of our own day. Scott makes up to us for his deficiencies in the matter of style by the surpassing human interest of his characters and incidents, their relations to the major currents

of human life. His scenes fill the stage of history, his personages seem adequate to great events, and the whole story has a certain historic grandeur and impressiveness. There is no mistaking a great force, a great body, in literature any more than there is in the physical world; in Scott we have come upon a great river, a great lake, a great mountain, and we are more impressed by it than by the lesser bodies, though they have many more graces and prettinesses.

Frederic Harrison, in a recent address on style, is cautious in recommending the young writer to take thought of his style. Let him rather take thought of what he has to say; in turning his ideal values into the coin of current speech he will have an exercise in style. If he has no ideal values, then is literature barred to him. Let him cultivate his sensibilities; make himself, if possible, more quickly responsive to life and nature about him; let him try to see more clearly and feel more keenly, and connect his vocabulary with his most radical and spontaneous self. Style can never come from the outside, — from consciously seeking it by imitating the manner of favorite authors. It comes, if at all, like the bloom upon fruit, or the glow of health upon the cheek, from an inner essential harmony and felicity.

In a well-known passage Macaulay tells what happened to Miss Burney when she began to think

about her style, and fell to imitating Dr. Johnson; how she lost the "charming vivacity" and "perfectly natural unconsciousness of manner" of her youthful writings, and became modish and affected. She threw away her own style, which was a "tolerably good one," and which might "have been improved into a very good one," and adopted "a style in which she could attain excellence only by achieving an almost miraculous victory over nature and over habit. She could cease to be Fanny Burney; it was not so easy to become Samuel Johnson."

It is giving too much thought to style in the more external and verbal aspects of it, which I am here considering, that leads to the confounding of style with diction, and that gives rise to the "stylist." The stylist shows you what can be done with mere words. He is the foliage plant of the literary flower garden. An English college professor has recently exploited him in a highly wrought essay on Style. Says our professor, "The business of letters is twofold, to find words for meaning and to find meaning for words." It strikes me that the last half of this proposition is not true of the serious writer, of the man who has something to say, but is true only of what is called the stylist, the man who has been so often described as one having nothing to say, which he says extremely well. The stylist's main effort is a verbal one, to find meaning for words; he does not wrestle with ideas, but with terms and phrases;

his thoughts are word-begotten and are often as unsubstantial as spectres and shadows.

The stylist cultivates words as the florist cultivates flowers, and a new adjective or a new collocation of terms is to him what a new chrysanthemum or a new pansy is to his brother of the forcing house. He is more an European product than an American. London and Paris abound in men who cultivate the art of expression for its own sake, who study how to combine words so as to tickle the verbal sense without much reference to the value of the idea expressed. Club and university life, excessive library culture — a sort of indoor or hothouse literary atmosphere — foster this sort of thing.

French literature can probably show more stylists than English, but the later school of British writers is not far behind in the matter of studied expression. Professor Raleigh, from whose work on style I quoted above, often writes forcibly and suggestively; but one cannot help but feel, on finishing his little volume, that it is more the work of a stylist than of a thinker. This is the opening sentence: "Style, the Latin name for an iron pen, has come to designate the art that handles, with ever fresh vitality and wary alacrity, the fluid elements of speech." Does not one faintly scent the stylist at the start? Later on he says: "In proportion as a phrase is memorable, the words that compose it become mutually adhesive, losing for a time something of their in-

dividual scope, — bringing with them, if they be torn away too quickly, some cumbrous fragments of their recent association." Does not the stylist stand fully confessed here? That he may avoid these "cumbrous fragments" that will stick to words when you suddenly pull them up by the roots, "a sensitive writer is often put to his shifts, and extorts, if he be fortunate, a triumph from the accident of his encumbrance." The lust of expression, the conjuring with mere words, is evident. "He is a poor stylist," says our professor, "who cannot beg half a dozen questions in a single epithet, or state the conclusion he would fain avoid in terms that startle the senses into clamorous revolt."

What it is in one that starts into "clamorous revolt" at such verbal gymnastics as are shown in the following sentences I shall not try to define, but it seems to me it is something real and legitimate. "A slight technical implication, a faint tinge of archaism in the common turn of speech that you employ, and in a moment you have shaken off the mob that scours the rutted highway, and are addressing a select audience of ticket holders with closed doors. A single natural phrase of peasant speech, a direct physical sense given to a word that genteel parlance authorizes readily enough in its metaphorical sense, and at a touch you have blown the roof off the drawing-room of the villa and have set its obscure inhabitants wriggling in the unaccustomed sunshine."

Amiel says of Renan that science was his material rather than his object; his object was style. Yet Renan was not a stylist in the sense in which I am using the word. His main effort was never a verbal one, never an effort to find meaning for words; he was intent upon his subject; his style was vital in his thought, and never took on airs on its own account. You cannot in him separate the artist from the thinker, nor give either the precedence. All writers with whom literature is an art aim at style in the sense that they aim to present their subject in the most effective form, — with clearness, freshness, force. They become stylists when their thoughts wait upon their words, or when their thoughts are word-begotten. Such writers as Gibbon, De Quincey, Macaulay, have studied and elaborate styles, but in each the matter is paramount and the mind finds something solid to rest upon.

"The chief of the incommodities imposed upon the writer," says Professor Raleigh, is "the necessity at all times and at all costs to mean something," or to find meaning for words. This no doubt is a hard task. The trouble begins when one has the words first. To invoke ideas with words is a much more difficult experience than the reverse process. But probably all true writers have something to say before they have the desire to say it, and in proportion as the thought is vital and real is its expression easy.

When I meet the stylist, with his straining for verbal effects, I love to recall this passage from Whitman. "The great poet," he says, "swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome. I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest, like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may, exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe; I will have purpose, as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me."

This is the same as saying that the great success in writing is to get language out of the way and to put your mind directly to the reader's, so that there be no veil of words between you. If the reader is preoccupied with your words, if they court his attention or cloud his vision, to that extent is the communication imperfect. In some of Swinburne's poems there is often such a din and echo of rhyme and alliteration that it is almost impossible to hear what the man is really saying.

To darken counsel with words is a common occurrence. Words are like lenses, — they must be arranged in just such a way, or they hinder rather than help the vision. When the adjustment is as it should be, the lens itself is invisible; and language in

the hands of the master is as transparent. Some of the more recent British poets affect the archaic, the quaint, the eccentric, in language, so that one's attention is almost entirely occupied with their words. Reading them is like trying to look through a pair of spectacles too old or too young for you, or with lenses of different focus.

But has not style a value in and of itself? As in the case of light, its value is in the revelation it makes. Its value is to conceal itself, to lose itself in the matter. If humility, or self-denial, or any of the virtues becomes conscious of itself and claims credit for its own sake, does it not that moment fall from grace? What incomparable style in the passage I have quoted from Whitman when we come to think of it, but how it effaces itself and is of no account for the sake of the idea it serves! The more a writer's style humbles itself, the more it is exalted. There is nothing true in religion that is not equally true in art. Give yourself entirely. All selfish and secondary ends are of the devil. Our Calvinistic grandfathers, who fancied themselves willing to be damned for the glory of God, illustrate the devotion of the true artist to his ideal. "Consider the lilies of the field, . . . they toil not, neither do they spin." The style of the born poet or artist takes as little thought of itself, and is the spontaneous expression of the same indwelling grace and necessity.

III

I once overheard a lady say to a popular author, "What I most admire about your books is their fine style." "But I never think about my style," was his reply. "I know you don't," said his admirer, "and that is why I like it so much." But we may regard him as thinking about his style, when he fancied himself thinking only about his matter. In his case the style and the matter were one. When he was consciously occupied only with the substance and texture of his thought, he was occupied with his style. Every effort to make the idea flow clear and pure, to give it freshness and fillip, or to seize and embody in words a mental or emotional impression in all its integrity, without blur or confusion, is an effort in style. It is like taking the alloys and impurities out of a metal; the style or beauty of it is improved. The making of iron into steel is a process of purification. When Froude was questioned about his style, he confessed that he had never given any thought to the subject; his aim had been to say what he had to say in the most direct and simple way possible. He was conscious only of trying to see clearly and to speak truly. I suppose this is the case with all first-class minds, in our day at least: the main endeavor is directed toward the matter, and not toward the manner; or rather, it is to make the one identical with the other. In no page of Froude's,

nor in any writer of equal range and seriousness, are we conscious of the style as something apart and that claims our admiration on its own account, as we are in the case of Walter Pater, for example. Such men as Pater are enamored of style itself, and cultivate it for its own sake. They conceive of it as an independent grace and charm that may be imparted to any subject by dint of an effort directed to verbal arrangement and sequence alone.

IV

There is a good deal of wisdom in Voltaire's saying that "all styles are good that are not tiresome." Voltaire's own style certainly has the merit of not tiring. Even in the English translation I never cease to marvel at its grace and buoyancy. In keeping with this dictum is the remark I heard concerning a certain living writer, namely, that he had the best style in literature to-day because one could read fifty pages of his and not know that one was reading at all; it was pure expression — offered no resistance.

This offering no resistance, this ease and limpidity — a getting rid of all friction in the written page — herein certainly lies the secret of much that is winsome in literature. How little friction the mind encounters in Addison, in Lamb, or in the best of our own prose writers; and how much in Meredith, and the later writings of Henry James! Is not friction to be got rid of as far as possible in all departments

of life? One does not want his shoes to pinch, nor his coat to bind, neither does he want to waste any strength on involved sentences, or on cryptic language. Did you ever try to row a boat in water in which lay a sodden fleece of newly fallen snow? I find the reading of certain books like that. Some of Browning's poems impede my mind in that way.

Force of impact — that is another matter; that warms and quickens the mind. Browning's "How they brought the Good News from Ghent" makes the mind hot by its rush and power. There is no mere mechanical friction of elliptical sentences and obscure allusions here.

Yes, the style that does not tire us is better than the style that does. Thus Arnold's style is better than Walter Pater's, because it is easier to follow; it is not so conscious of itself; it is not so obviously studied. Pater studied words; Arnold studied ideas. Pater sacrificed the more familiar democratic traits of language — ease, simplicity, flexibility, transparency — to his passion for the more choice aristocratic features, — the perfumed, the academic, the highly wrought. Again, I find Arnold's style less fatiguing than Lowell's, because it has more current, more continuity of thought, and is freer from *concetti* and mere surface sparkle. I find Swinburne's prose more tiresome than that of any contemporary British critic, because of its inflated polysyllabic character, and his poetry more cloying than that of any

other poet, because of its almost abnormal lilt and facility; it has a pathological fluidity; it seems as though, when he begins to write verse, his whole mental structure is in danger of melting down and running away in mere words. His heat is that of fever; his inspiration borders on delirium.

We never tire of Addison by reason of his style, or of Swift or of Lamb or of our own Irving or Hawthorne or Warner. It is probably as rare to find a French writer whose style tires the reader as it is to find a German whose style does not. As M. Brunetière well says, French literature is a social literature, German is philosophic, and English individualistic. It is the business of the first to be agreeable, of the second to be profound, of the third to be original. Who does not tire of Strauss sooner than of Renan, of Macaulay sooner than of Sainte-Beuve?

A writer with a pronounced, individualistic style — one full of mere mechanical difficulties, like Browning's or Carlyle's — runs great risk of wearying the reader and of being left behind. So far as his style degenerates into mannerism, so far is he handicapped in the race. Smoothness is not beauty, neither is roughness power; yet without a certain harmony and continuity there is neither beauty nor power. Herbert Spencer, in his essay on the Philosophy of Style, would have a writer avoid this danger of wearying his reader, by writing alternately in different styles. "To have a specific style," he says,

"is to be poor in speech." "The perfect writer will express himself as Junius, when in the Junius frame of mind; when he feels as Lamb felt, will use a like familiar speech; and will fall into the ruggedness of Carlyle when in a Carlylean mood." A man who should try to follow this advice would be pretty sure to be Jack-of-all-styles and master of none. What a piece of patchwork his composition would be! A "specific style" is not to be avoided; it is to be cultivated and practiced till every false note, every trace of crudeness and insincerity, is purged out of it.

The secret of good prose is a subtle quality or flavor, hard to define, like that of a good apple or a good melon, and it is as intimately bound up in the very substance and texture in the one case as in the other, and, we may add, is of as many varieties. We are sure always to get good prose from Mr. Howells and Colonel Higginson, but we are not always so sure of getting it from certain of our younger novelists.

Here is a sample of bad prose from a popular novel by a Southern writer: —

"The whole woods emerged from the divine bath of nature with the coolness, the freshness, the immortal purity of Diana united to the roseate glow and mortal tenderness of Venus, and haunted by two spirits: the chaste, unfading youth of Endymion and the dust-born warmth and eagerness of Dionysus."

Yet the man who could permit himself the use of such inflated language as that, was capable of turning off such a passage as this: —

"Some women, in marrying, demand all and give all: with good men they are happy; with base men they are the broken-hearted. Some demand everything and give little: with weak men they are tyrants; with strong men they are the divorced. Some demand little and give all: with congenial souls they are already in heaven; with uncongenial they are soon in their graves. Some give little and demand little: they are the heartless, and they bring neither the joy of life nor the peace of death."

That is sound prose; it is like a passage from a great classic.

When we advise the young writer to go honestly to work to say in the simplest manner what he really thinks and feels, one does not mean that by this course he is likely to write like the great prose masters, but that by this means alone can his work have the basic qualities of good literature, — directness, veracity, vitality, the beauty and reality of natural things. Genuineness first, grace and eloquence afterwards.

"The ugliest living face," says Schopenhauer, "is better than a mask." It is real, it is alive. So the simple, direct speech of a man in earnest is so much better than the perfunctory eloquence one is so often compelled to hear or to read. Real-

ity, reality — nothing can make up for a want of reality.

Sainte-Beuve said, as I have already quoted, that the peasant always has style; the French peasant probably more often than any other. This is certainly so if we take such a character as Joan of Arc as a typical peasant. What adroitness, and at times, classic beauty in her answer to her judges! When they sought to entrap her with the question, "Do you know if you are in the grace of God?" she replied, "If I am not, may God place me there; if I am, may God so keep me." Under pressure, the peasant mind, and indeed all other minds, are, at times, capable of these things. But usually the charm of rustic speech is in its plainness and simplicity, like that of other rural things, a bridge, a woodshed, a well-sweep, a log house, — no thought of style, thought of service only. But the beauty of what may be called the architectural style of the great prose masters, — Gibbon, Burke, Browne, Hooker, De Quincey, — like the beauty of a Greek temple or a Gothic cathedral, is quite another matter. What both have in common is the beauty of sincerity and reality.

The vernacular style of writers of the seventeenth century, like Walton, Fuller, Baxter, Jonson, is more in keeping with the taste of to-day than the rhetorical and highly wrought style of certain of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century writers.

Hence, when we ascribe style to simple, homely things, or to speech, we mean something quite different from style when applied to the great compositions either in literature, music, or architecture.

Milton could plan and build the lofty rhyme and attain beauty; Wordsworth attains beauty by his sincerity and simplicity, and his fervent love of rural things. He has not style in the Miltonic sense. One has classic beauty, the other, natural or naïve beauty. The monumental works of the ancients were planned and wrought like their architecture, and have a beauty that rivals nature. Shakespeare rarely attains anything like classic beauty; and has any poem since Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" struck the note firmly and surely?

V

I have often asked myself why it is that the interviewer will sometimes get so much more wisdom out of a man, and so many more fresh and entertaining statements — in short, so much better literature — than the man can get out of himself. Is it because one's best and ripest thoughts rise to the surface, like the cream on the milk, and does the interviewer simply skim them off? Maybe, in writing, we often dip too deep, make too great an effort. Interviews are nearly always interesting, — much more so than a formal studied statement by the interviewed himself. Many a piece of sound, excellent

literature has been got out of a man who had no skill at all with the pen. His spoken word is vital and real; but in a conscious literary effort the fire is quenched at once. Hence the charm of letters, of diaries, of the simple narrations and recitals of pioneers, farmers, workers, or persons who have no conscious literary equipment. Who would not rather read a bit of real experience of a soldier in battle, such as a clever interviewer could draw out of him, than to read his general's studied account of the same engagement? "To elaborate is of no avail," says Whitman. "Learned and unlearned feel that it is so." Only the great artist can rival or surpass the sense of reality we often find in common speech. Set a man to writing out his views or his experience and the danger is that he will be too formal; he will get himself up for the occasion; there will be no ease or indifference in his manner; he will go to delving in his mind, and we shall miss the simple, direct self-expression that we are after.

In Dr. Johnson's talk, as reported by Boswell, we touch the real man; in the "Rambler" you touch only his clothes or his periwig. His more formal writing seems the product of some kind of artificial put-on faculty, like the Sunday sermons one hears or the newspaper editorials one reads. The sermon is in what may be called the surpliced style, the Rambler in the periwigged style. Emerson said of Alcott that his conversation was wonderful, but that

when he sat down to write his inspiration left him. Most men are wiser in company than in the study. What is interesting in a man is what he himself has felt or seen or experienced. If you can tell us that, we shall listen eagerly. The uncultured man does not know this, but seeks the far-off or the deep down.

Our thoughts, our opinions, are like apples on the tree: they must take time to ripen; and when they are ripe, how easily they fall! A mere nudge brings them down. How easily the old man talks; how full he is of wisdom! Time was when his tongue was tied; he could not express himself; his thoughts were half formed and unripe; they clung tightly to the bough. Set him to writing, and with great labor he produced some crude, half-formed notions of his own, mixed with the riper opinions of the authors he had read. But now his fruit has matured and it has mellowed; it has color and flavor; and his conversation abounds in wisdom.

VI

The standard of style of the last century was more aristocratic than is the standard of to-day. The important words with Hume, Blair, Johnson, Bolingbroke, as applied to style, were elegance, harmony, ornament; and the chief of these was elegance: the composition must make the impression of elegance, as to-day we demand the impression of the vital and

the real. Even the homely is more suited to the genius of democracy than is the elegant. Perhaps the word is distasteful to modern ears from its conventional associations or its appropriation by milliners and dressmakers. One would not care to write *in*-elegantly, but would rather his page did not suggest the word at all, as he would have his home or his dress suggest the quieter, humbler, more serviceable virtues. In the old story of Bruce's saying, the style may be said to be homely. "I doubt I have killed the comyn." "Ye doubt?" replies Kirkpatrick; "I mak siccar." Hume puts this into elegant language in this wise: "Sir Thomas Kirkpatrick, one of Bruce's friends, asking him soon after if the traitor was slain, 'I believe so,' replied Bruce. 'And is that a matter,' cried Kirkpatrick, 'to be left to conjecture? I will secure him.'" This is polite prose, dressed-up prose, but its charm for us is gone.

VII

There are as many styles as there are moods and tempers in men. Words may be used so as to give us a sense of vigor, a sense of freshness, a sense of the choice and scholarly, or of the dainty and exclusive, or of the polished and elaborate, or of heat or cold, or of any other quality known to life. Every work of genius has its own physiognomy — sad, cheerful, frowning, yearning, determined, meditative. This book has the face of a saint; that of a scholar

or a seer. Here is the feminine, there the masculine face. One has the clerical face, one the judicial. Each appeals to us according to our temperaments and mental predilections. Who shall say which style is the best? What can be better than the style of Huxley for his purpose, — sentences level and straight like a hurled lance; or than Emerson's for his purpose, — electric sparks, the sudden, unexpected epithet or tense, audacious phrase, that gives the mind a wholesome shock; or than Gibbon's for his purpose, — a style like solid masonry, every sentence cut four square, and his work, as Carlyle said to Emerson, a splendid bridge, connecting the ancient world with the modern; or than De Quincey's for his purpose, — a discursive, roundabout style, herding his thoughts as a collie dog herds sheep; or than Arnold's for his academic spirit, — a style like cut glass; or than Whitman's for his continental spirit, — the processional, panoramic style that gives the sense of mass and multitude? Certain things we may demand of every man's style, — that it shall do its work, that it shall touch the quick. To be colorless like Arnold is good, and to have color like Ruskin is good; to be lofty and austere like the old Latin and Greek authors is good, and to be playful and discursive like Dr. Holmes is good; to be condensed and epigrammatic like Bacon pleases, and to be flowing and copious like Macaulay pleases. Within certain limits the manner that is

native to the man, the style that is a part of himself, is what wears best. What we do not want in any style is hardness, glitter, tumidity, superfetation, unreality.

In treating of nature or outdoor themes, let the style have limpidness, sweetness, freshness; in criticism let it have dignity, lucidity, penetration; in history let it have mass, sweep, comprehension; in all things let it have vitality, sincerity, and genuineness.

IV

CRITICISM AND THE MAN

I

IT looks as though we were never to get to the end of the discussion about criticism—its scope, aims, functions, any more than we are likely to get to the end of the discussion of any real question in philosophy, ethics, or religion.

Is the aim of literary criticism judgment, or interpretation, or analysis, or description? May it not have all these aims? For myself, I am disposed to answer in the affirmative.

I doubt if there will ever be a critical method which all may apply. Every man will have his own method, as truly as he has his own manners. The French critic Schérer inclines to "the method which sets to work to comprehend rather than to class, to explain rather than to judge," or which asks as the first step to possess itself of the author's point of view. This is substantially Pope's dictum that a work is to be read in the spirit in which it was written, and it accords with Heine's saying that the critic is to ask, "What does the artist intend?" This is a part of, but does it sum up, the critical function?

A man's writing upon the works of another takes the form of description and analysis — like the report of a naturalist upon a new species, which Mr. Howells thinks is the main function of criticism, or it may aim chiefly at interpretation, which a recent essayist emphasizes as the latest and highest phase of criticism; or it may aim at a judicial estimate, an authoritative verdict from the rules and standards, which is the more classic and academic phase of criticism.

Each phase is legitimate and leads to valuable results.

Of any considerable artistic work we want a description and an analysis, we want an interpretation and an exposition, and we want an appraisement according to the standard of the best that has been thought and done in the world, — not a comparison with the externals of the accepted models, but with the originality, the spontaneity, the sanity, the inner necessity and consistency of them — the truth to nature and to the laws of the human mind. Is it liberating, vitalizing, cheering? Is it ethically sound? Does it favor large and manly ideals? Does it go along with evolution and progress?

What, for instance, will criticism do with the work of such a man as Whitman, or Ibsen, or Tolstoi? It will describe it and analyze it, and name it as lyric, epic, dramatic, etc.; it will interpret it, or draw out and expound the ideas that lie back of it

and out of which it sprang; it will seek to understand it and to get at the writer's point of view; then it will judge it, try it by its own standards, and seek to estimate the value of these standards as they stand related to the best aims and achievements of the human mind.

We demand of these men what we demand of Browning, Tennyson, Hugo, and every other poet and writer of high claims, — genuineness, sincerity, power, inspiration, and that they awaken in us fresh and vivid currents of ideas and emotions. We shall not quarrel with their methods, or materials, or their form, or formlessness, but they must go to the quick. All our pleasure and profit in great art — painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry — is at last one, a new experience of the beauty and significance of nature and life. We are made to feel these emotions afresh and as if for the first time.

Here are the old eternal elements, — life, nature, the soul, man and woman, all in danger of becoming dull, commonplace, uninteresting to us. But the man with the creative touch gives us a new and lively sense of them, by presenting them to us in new combinations and under new lights. The only new thing added is himself, — the quality or flavor of his own genius.

A complete criticism will not limit itself to description or to interpretation; it will seek to estimate, to bring out the relative or absolute value of

the thing. Mr. Howells in his trenchant little volume on "Criticism and Fiction," says the critic has no more business to trample on a poem, a novel, or an essay that does not please him, than the botanist has to grind a plant under his heel because he does not find it pretty. His business "is to classify and analyze the fruits of the human mind as the naturalist classifies the objects of his study, rather than to praise or blame them."

To classify and analyze the fruits of the human mind is certainly one of the functions of criticism, and only one. The analogy Mr. Howells employs is misleading. We do not sit in judgment on natural specimens and products except as they stand related to human wants and utilities. We compare climates, seasons, soils, landscapes, with reference to racial and individual needs and well-being. If you bring me trees from the woods or stone from the quarry to build my house with, I am bound to sit in judgment upon them. And when my house is built, my neighbors will sit in judgment upon it. Of all artificial things, of all man's works, we are bound to ask, Are they well done? are they what they should be? are they the best of their kind? Shall we not ask these questions of the poem also, of the novel, the essay, the history?

Art has relations to life, and the critic is bound to consider what these relations are in any given work, — how true, how important; he is examining a hu-

man product, not a natural specimen, and is as competent to reject as to accept; he must compare, weigh, appraise, to the best of his ability.

The specimens of natural history are perfect after their kind; the main question with them is, to which kind of species does a given specimen belong? But the poem or the history or the novel is not always perfect after its kind. Their kind is usually obvious at a glance, but their merits or demerits, their relation to the best that has been thought and done in the world, are not so obvious. Hence we praise or blame according as they come up to or fall short of their own ideal. The critic is not so much a botanist naming a new flower, as he is a brother gardener criticising your horticulture, or a brother lawyer criticising your brief. We are all critics in this sense one way or another every day of our lives; we try to get at the real value of whatever is offered us, whether it be lands, houses, goods, friends, stocks, bonds, news, pictures, or books; we criticise the men we deal with and employ in order to find out whom to trust; we must have our wits about us when we go to market or go shopping. The critical habit — sifting, testing, comparing, to get at the true value of things — goes with us through life, or else we come often to grief. The finer the product, or the higher the purpose it serves, the more careful is our investigation.

When we come to literature and art our worldly

practical wisdom does not carry very far. It is not now a question of fact or of material values, but of ideal and æsthetic values; it is a question of truth to nature and to life, and of the largest, most vital truth. The mass of readers have little power of divining the good from the bad, the true from the false, in this field. Not the first best, but the second or third best will draw the multitude.

The literary value of a work is more intangible and elusive, harder to define and bring out, than its scientific or moral or other values. It resides in a certain vitality and genuineness of expression; we have a sense of having come face to face with something real and alive in the man, and not, as is so often the case, with something assumed or put on. There is always an original inherent quality and flavor, as in natural products. The language is not the mere garment of the thought, it is the very texture and substance. In all true literature something more than mind and erudition speak, — a man speaks; a vital personality is imminent, — a Charles Lamb, a Wordsworth, a Carlyle, a Huxley, an Emerson, a Thoreau, a Lowell, — all distinct types of intelligence speaking through character.

Self-expression within certain limits is as important in criticism as in any other form of literature.

The French critic Ferdinand Brunetière says that the truly personal way of seeing and feeling, which is a merit of the poet and the novelist, is a fault in the

critic, because the critical function is mainly a judicial one.

In every man there is the common humanity, a measure of the pure reason which he shares with all; then there are the race traits, the family traits, the bias of his times, the bent given by his training and surroundings, and his own special stamp and make-up, — what we call his idiosyncrasy. All these things will play a part in his view of any matter. His success as a critic is when his humanity, his pure intelligence, furnishes the light which is only colored or refracted by its passage through these elements. But colored and refracted it will be, and it is this coloring and refraction or stamp of the personal equation that gives value and charm to the man's work as literature. Reduce criticism to a science, or eliminate the element of impressionism, and the result is no longer literature. The reason may be convinced, but the emotions are untouched.

The one thing that distinguishes all modern literatures from the works of the ancient or classic period is their more permanent subjectivity, and the piercing lyrical note in them.

Self-expression has been the aim of the modern artist in a much fuller sense than it was with the artists of the pagan world. Our religion is a personal and subjective religion, — the kingdom of heaven is within. Christianity turned the thoughts of men upon themselves. Self-examination, self-

criticism began. Man became conscious of himself, of his sins, and of his shortcomings, and learned to be more interested in the elements of his own character.

There is probably no greater delusion than that under which the critic labors when he thinks he is trying the new work by the standard of the best that has been thought and achieved in the world. He is trying it by his own conception of that standard; so much of it as is vital in his own mind he can apply, and no more. His own individual taste and judgment are, after all, his tests. The standard of the best is not some rule of thumb or of yardstick that every one can apply; only the best can apply the best.

Impressionism, therefore, is at the bottom of all criticism, in whatever field. The impression which the work makes upon your intelligence, your taste, your judgment, is all that you can finally give.

Criticism in France, where the art has been more assiduously cultivated than in any other country, seems divided between judicial critics like Brunetière and impressionist critics like Lemaître. The latter states in terms of his own likes and dislikes what the other aims to state in terms of the impersonal reason. But their conclusions are likely to differ only as their temperaments and innate affinities differ. Brunetière has the more dogmatic mind and the more violent antipathies. He could call Sainte-Beuve a rat, — a verdict that savors more of

political and religious intolerance than of the impartial reason.

Are we not coming more and more to demand that in all literary and artistic productions, the producer be present in his work, not merely as mind, as pure intelligence, but also as a distinct personality, giving a flavor of his own to the principles he utters? Every vital creative work is the revelation of a man as well as of a mind, and this is true in criticism no less than in other forms of literature.

Suppose Brunetière's criticism lacked that which makes it Brunetière's, or Arnold's lacked that which makes it Arnold's, should we long care for it? Eliminate from the works of these men all that is individual, all that in each makes the impression of a new literary force, the accent of personality, and you take from the salt its savor. Dare we say that the most precious thing in literature is the individual and the specific? Is not a platitude a platitude because it lacks just these things? The vague and the general may be had in any quantity, at any time. The distinct and the characteristic are always rare. How many featureless novels, featureless poems, featureless discourses, how much savorless criticism of one kind and another, every community produces! Now and then we catch a distinct personal note, a new, penetrating voice, and this we remember and follow in criticism as readily as in poetry or fiction. Have we not here the secret of the

greater interest we take in signed criticism over unsigned?

The pure, disinterested, impersonal reason is a fine thing to contemplate. Who would flout it or deny it? One might as well throw stones at the sun. But as the pure white light of the sun is broken up into a thousand hues and shades as it comes back to us from the living world, so the light of reason comes to us from literature in a thousand blended tints and colors, or as modified by the varying moods and temperaments of the individual writers. Whether or not we want or have a right to expect this pure white light in criticism, what we get is the light as it is reduced or colored by the critic's personality, — the media of his time, his race, his personal equation. It must render accurately the objects, form and feature; but the hue, the atmosphere, the sentiment of it all, the highest value of it all, will be the contribution of the critic's most private and radical self.

Every eminent writer has his way of looking at things, gives his own coloring to general truths, and it is this that endears him to us. Is the word he speaks *his* word, — is it inevitable, the verdict of his character, the outcome of that which is most vital and characteristic in him? Or is it something he has learned, or the result of fashion, convention, imitation?

See how the old elements of the air, soil, water,

forever recombine under the touch of that mysterious something we call life, and produce new herbage, new flowers, new fruit, new men, new women, — forever and yet never the same. So do the forces of man's spirit recombine with the old facts and truisms, and produce new art and new literature.

II

Is it not equally true that the value of criticism as a guide to the judgment or the taste, teaching us what to admire and what to condemn, is less than its value as an intellectual pleasure and stimulus, its power to awaken ideas? Judgment is good, but inspiration is better. How rarely we make the judgments of the greatest critics our own! We are pleased when they confirm our own, but is not our main interest and profit in what the critic gives us out of himself? We do not, for instance, care very much for Carlyle's literary judgments, but for Carlyle's quality of mind, his flashes of poetic insight, his burden of conscience, his power of portraiture, his heroic moral fibre, we care a great deal. Arnold thought Carlyle's criticism less sound than Johnson's, — more tainted with *engouement*, with passion and appetite, as it probably is; but how much more incentive, how much more quickening power, how much more of the stuff of which life is made, do we get from Carlyle than from Johnson or from Arnold himself!

That the criticism is sound is not enough, — it must also warm and stimulate the mind; and if it do this we shall not trouble ourselves very much about its conclusions. Even M. Brunetière says that there are masterpieces in the history of literature and art whose authors were downright fools, as there are, on the other hand, mediocre works from the hands of men of vast intelligence. Very many readers, I fancy, will not rest in the main conclusions at which Tolstöi arrives in his recent discussion of the question "What is art?" but who can fail to feel that here is a large, sincere, helpful soul, whose conception of life and of art is of great value? If we were to estimate Ruskin by the soundness of his judgments alone, we should miss the most important part of him. It is as a prophet of life as well as a critic of art that we value him. Would he be a better critic were he less a prophet?

Or take a more purely critical mind, such as Matthew Arnold's. Do we care very much even for his literary judgments? Do we not care much more for his qualities as a writer, — his lucidity, his centrality, his style, his continuity of thought, his turns of expression, his particular interpretation of literature and life? His opinions may be sound, but this is not the secret of his power; it resides in something more intimate and personal to himself. The late Principal Shairp was probably as sound a critic as was Arnold, but his work is of much less interest,

because it does not contain the same vital expression of a new and distinct type of mind. Arnold was a better critic of literature than of life and history. There were other values than literary ones that were not so clearly within his range. In 1870 he thought the Germans would stand a poor chance in the war with France. How could the German *Gemeinheit*, or commonness, stand up before the French *esprit?* In our civil war, he expected the South to win. Did not the South have distinction? But distinction counts for more in style than in war. Arnold's criticism has the great merit of being a clear and forcible expression of a fine-bred, high-toned, particular type of man, and that type a pure and noble one. There was no bungling, no crudeness, no straining, no confusion, no snap judgment, and apparently no bias. He was as steady as a clock. His ideas were continuous and homogeneous; they run like living currents all through his works, and give them unity and definitiveness. He is not to be effaced or overthrown; he is only to be matched and appraised. His word is not final, but it is fit and challenges your common sense. His contribution flows into the current of English criticism like a clear stream into a turbid one; it is not deep, but pellucid, — a tributary that improves the quality of the whole. It gives us that refreshment and satisfaction that we always get from the words of a man who speaks in his own right and from ample grounds of personal conviction.

Positive judgments in literature or in art, or in any matters of taste, are dangerous things. The crying want always is for new, fresh power to break up the old verdicts and opinions, and set all afloat again. "We must learn under the master how to destroy him." The great critic gives us courage to reverse his judgments. Dr. Johnson said that Dryden was the writer who first taught us to determine the merit of composition upon principle; but criticism has been just as much at variance with itself since Dryden's time as it was before. It is an art, and not a science, — one of the forms of literary art, wherein, as in all other forms of art, the man, and not the principle, is the chief factor.

III

When one thinks of it, how diverse and contradictory have been the judgments of even the best critics! Behold how Macaulay's verdicts differ from Carlyle's, Carlyle's from Arnold's, Arnold's from Frederic Harrison's or Morley's or Stephen's or Swinburne's; how Taine and Sainte-Beuve diverge upon Balzac; how Renan and Arnold diverge upon Hugo; how Lowell and Emerson diverge upon Whitman; and how wide apart are contemporary critics about the merits of Browning, Ibsen, Toistoi. Landor could not tolerate Dante, and even the great Goethe told Eckermann that Dante was one of the authors he was forbidden to read. In Byron's judg-

ment, Griffiths and Rogers were greater poets than Wordsworth and Coleridge. The German Professor Grimm sees in Goethe "the greatest poet of all times and all people," which makes Matthew Arnold smile. Chateaubriand considered Racine as much superior to Shakespeare as the Apollo Belvidere is superior to an uncouth Egyptian statue. Every nation, says a French critic, has its chords of sensibility that are utterly incomprehensible to another. "Many and diverse," says Arnold, "must be the judgments passed upon every great poet, upon every considerable writer." And it seems that the greater the writer or poet, the more diverse and contradictory will be the judgments upon him. The small men are easily disposed of, — there is no dispute about them; but the great ones baffle and try us. It is around their names, as Sainte-Beuve somewhere remarks, that there goes on a perpetual critical tournament.

It would seem that the nearer we are, in point of time, to an event, a man, a book, a work of art, the less likely we are to estimate them rightly, especially if they are out of the usual and involve great questions and points. Such a poet as Dante or Victor Hugo or Whitman, or such a character as Napoleon or Cromwell or John Brown, or such an artist as Angelo or Turner or Millet, will require time to settle his claim. In literature, the men of the highest order, to be understood, must undoubtedly, in a

measure, wait for the growth of the taste of themselves, or until their own ideals have become at home in men's minds. With every great innovation, in whatever field, every year that passes finds our minds better adjusted to it and more keenly alive to its merits. Contemporary criticism is bound to be contradictory. Men take opposite views of current questions; they are too near them to see all their bearings. How different the aspect the slavery question wears at this distance, and the civil war that grew out of it, from the face they wore a generation or two ago! It is only the few great minds that see to-day what the masses will see to-morrow. They occupy a vantage ground of character and principle that is like an eminence in a landscape, commanding a wide view. Sainte-Beuve certainly did injustice to Balzac, and Schérer to Béranger. Theirs were contemporary judgments, and personal antipathy played a large part in them. Sainte-Beuve says that when two good intellects pass totally different judgments on the same author, it is because they are not fixing their thoughts, for the moment, on the same object; they have not the whole of him before their eyes; their view does not take him in entirely. That is just it: we each look for different values; we are more keenly alive to some merits than to others; what one critic misses another sees. We are more or less like chemical elements, that unite eagerly with some of their fellows, and not with others.

The elective affinities are at work everywhere, — where is the critical genius that is a universal solvent? Probably Sainte-Beuve himself comes as near it as anybody who has lived.

IV

It is not truth alone that makes literature; it is truth plus a man. Readers fancy they are interested in the birds and flowers they find in the pages of the poets; but no, it is the poets themselves that they are interested in. There are the same birds and flowers in the fields and woods, — do they care for them? In many of the authors of whom Sainte-Beuve writes I have no interest, but I am always interested in Sainte-Beuve's view of them, in the play of his intelligence and imagination over and around them. After reading his discussion of Cowper, or Fénelon, or Massillon, or Pascal, it is not the flavor of these writers that remains in my mind, but the flavor of the critic himself. I am under his spell, and not that of his subject. Is not this equally true of the criticism of Goethe, or Carlyle, or Macaulay, or Lamb, or Hazlitt, or Coleridge, or any other? The pages of these writers are no more a transparent medium, through which we see the subject as in itself it is, than are those of any other creative artist. Science shows us, or aims to show us, the thing as it is; but art shows it to us tinged by the prismatic rays of the human spirit. Criticism that warms and

interests is perpetual creation, as Sainte-Beuve suggested. It is a constant combination of the subject with the thought of the critic. When Mr. James writes upon Sainte-Beuve we are under his spell; it is Mr. James that absorbs and delights us now. We get the truth about his subject, of course, but it is always in combination with the truth about Mr. James. The same is true when Macaulay writes about Milton, and Carlyle about Burns or Johnson, and Emerson about Montaigne or Plato, and Lowell about Thoreau or Wordsworth, — the critic reveals himself in and through his subject.

We do not demand that Arnold get the real Arnold out of the way and merge himself into general humanity (this he cannot do in any case), but only that he put aside the conscious exterior Arnold, so to speak, — Arnold the supercilious, the contemptuous, the hater of dissent, the teaser of the Philistine. The critic must escape from the local and accidental. We would have Macaulay cease to be a Whig, Johnson cease to be a Tory, Schérer forget his theological training, and Brunetière escape from his Catholic bias.

V

No matter how much truth the critic tells us, if his work does not itself rise to the dignity of good literature, if he does not use language in a vital and imaginative way, we shall not care for him. Liter-

ary and artistic truth is not something that can be seized and repeated indifferently by this man and by that, like the truths of science: it must be reproduced or recreated by the critic; it must be as vital in his page as in that of his author. The truths of science are static; the truths of art are dynamic. If a mediocre mind writes about Shakespeare, the result is mediocre, no matter how much bare truth he tells us.

What, then, do we mean by a great critic? We mean a great mind that finds complete self-expression in and through the works of other men. Arnold found more complete self-expression through literary criticism than through any other channel: hence he is greatest here; his theological and religious criticism shows him to less advantage. Sainte-Beuve tried poetry and fiction, but did not find a complete outlet for his talent till he tried criticism. Not a profound or original mind, but a wonderfully flexible, tolerant, sympathetic, engaging one; a climbing plant, one might say, that needed some support to display itself to the best advantage. We say of the French mind generally that it is more truly a critical mind than the English; it finds in criticism a better field for the display of its special gifts — taste, clearness, brevity, flexibility, judgment — than does the more original and profoundly emotional English. French criticism is rarely profound, but it is always light, apt, graceful, delicate,

lucid, felicitous, — clear sense and good taste marvelously blended.

Criticism in its scientific aspects or as a purely intellectual effort — a search for the exact truth, a sifting of evidence, weighing and comparing data, disentangling testimony, separating the false from the true, as with the lawyer, the doctor, the man of science, the critic of old texts and documents — is one thing. Criticism of literature and art, involving questions of taste, style, poetic and artistic values, is quite another, and demands quite other powers. In the former case it is mainly judicial, dispassionate, impersonal; in the latter case the sympathies and special predilections are more involved. We seek more or less to interpret the imaginative writer, to draw out and emphasize his special quality and stimulus, to fuse him and restate him in other terms; and in doing this we give ourselves more freely. We cannot fully interpret what we do not love, and love has eyes the judgment knows not of. What a man was born to say, what he speaks out of his most radical selfhood, — that the same fate and power in you can alone fully estimate and interpret.

VI

One's search after the truth in subjective matters is more or less a search after one's self, after what is agreeable to one's constitutional bias or innate

partialities. We do not see the thing as it is in itself so much as we see it as it stands related to our individual fragment of existence. The lesson we are slowest to learn and to act upon is the relativity of truth in all these matters, or that it is what we make it. It is a product of the mind, as the apple is of the tree. We get one kind of truth from Renan, another from Taine, still another from Ruskin or Carlyle or Arnold. The quality differs according as the minds or spirits differ whence the truth proceeds. Do we expect all the apples in the orchard to be alike? In general qualities, but not in particular flavors; and in literature it is the particular flavor that is most precious. It is the quality imparted to the truth by the conceiving mind that we prize.

It is a long while before we rise to the perception that opposites are true, that contrary types equally serve. "One supreme does not contradict another supreme," says Whitman, "any more than one eyesight contravenes another eyesight, or one hearing contravenes another hearing." Great men have been radical and great men have been conservative; great men have been orthodox and they have been heterodox; they have been forces of expansion and they have been forces of contraction. In literature, it is good to be a realist, and it is good to be a romanticist; it is good to be a Dumas, and it is good to be a Zola; it is good to be a Carlyle, and it is

good to be a Mazzini, — always provided that one is so from the inside and not from without, from original conviction and not from hearsay or conformity.

A man makes his way in the world amid opposing forces; he becomes something only by overcoming something; there is always a struggle for survival, and always merit in that which survives. Let each be perfect after its kind. We do not object to the Gothic type of mind because it is not the classic, nor to the Englishman because he is not the Frenchman. We look for the measure of nature or natural force and authority in these types. Nature is of all types; she is of to-day as well as of yesterday; she is of this century as well as of the first; she was with Burns as well as with Pindar. Because the Greek was natural, shall we say therefore nature is Greek? She is Asiatic, Icelandic, Saxon, Celtic, American, as well. She is all things to all men; and without her nothing is that is.

VII

Truth is both subjective and objective. The former is what is agreeable to one's constitution and point of view, or mental and spiritual make-up. Objective truth is verifiable truth, or what agrees with outward facts and conditions.

Criticism deals with both aspects. It is objective when it is directed upon objective or verifiable facts; it is subjective when it is directed upon subjective

facts. It is an objective fact, for instance, that such a man as Shakespeare lived in such a country in such a time, that he wrote various plays of such and such a character, and that these plays were founded upon other plays or legends or histories. But the poetic truth, the poetic beauty of these plays, their covert meanings, the philosophy that lies back of them, are not in the same sense objective facts. In these respects no two persons read them just alike. Hamlet has been interpreted in many ways. Which Hamlet is the true one, Goethe's, or Coleridge's, or Hazlitt's, or Kean's, or Booth's? Each is true, so far as it expresses a real and vital conception begotten by the poet upon the critic's or the actor's mind. The beauty of a poem or any work of art is not an objective something patent to all; it is an experience of the mind which we each have in different degrees. In fact, the field of our æsthetic perceptions and enjoyments is no more fixed and definite than is the field of our religious perceptions and enjoyments, and we diverge from one another in the one case as much as in the other. This divergence is of course, in both cases, mainly superficial; it is in form and not in essence. Religions perish, but religion remains. Styles of art pass, but art abides. Go deep enough and we all agree, because human nature is fundamentally the same everywhere. All that I mean to say is that the outward expressions of art differ in different ages and among different

races as much as do the outward expressions of religion. In all these matters the subjective element plays an important part. Is Browning a greater poet than Tennyson? Is Thackeray a greater novelist than Dickens? Has Newman a better style than Arnold? Is Poe our greatest poet, as many British critics think? These and all similar questions involve the personal equation of the critic, and his answer to them will be given more by his unconscious than by his conscious self. The appeal is not so much to his rational faculties as to his secret affinities or his æsthetic perceptions. You can move a man's reason, but you cannot by any similar process change his taste or his faith. If we are not by nature committed to certain views, we are committed to a certain habit of mind, to a certain moral and spiritual attitude, which makes these views almost inevitable to us. "It is not given to all minds," says Sainte-Beuve, "to feel and to relish equally the peculiar beauties and excellences of Massillon," or, it may be added, of any other author, especially if he be of marked individuality.

We do not and cannot all have the same measure of appreciation of Emerson, or Wordsworth, or Ruskin, or Whitman, or Browning. To enjoy these men "sincerely and without weariness is a quality and almost a peculiarity of certain minds, which may serve to define them." Sainte-Beuve himself was chiefly interested in an author's character, — "in

what was most individual in his personality." He had no arbitrary rules, touchstones, or systems, but pressed each new work gently, almost caressingly, till it gave up its characteristic quality and flavor.

But the objective consideration of the merits of a man's work does not and cannot preclude or measure the subjective attraction or repulsion or indifference which we do or do not feel toward that work. Something deeper and more potent than reason is at work here. Back of the most impartial literary judgment lies the fact that the critic is a person; that he is of a certain race, family, temperament, environment; that he is naturally cold or sympathetic, liberal or reactionary, tolerant or intolerant, and therefore has his individual likes and dislikes; that certain types attract him more than others; that, of two poets of equal power, the voice of one moves him more than that of the other. Something as subtle and vital and hard to analyze as the flavor of a fruit, and analogous to it, makes him prefer this poet to that. One may see clearly the superiority of Milton over Wordsworth, and yet cleave to the latter. How beautiful is "Lycidas," yet it left Dr. Johnson cold and critical. There is much more of a cry — a real cry of the heart — in Arnold's "Thyrsis." One feels that the passion is real in one, and assumed in the other. Is "Lycidas" therefore less a creative work? The affirmative side of the question is not without support. Johnson undervalued some of

Gray's best work; the touch of sympathy was lacking. This touch of sympathy does not wait upon the critical judgment, but often underruns and outruns it. It is said that Miss Martineau found "Tom Jones" dull reading, that Charlotte Brontë cared not for Jane Austen, and that Thackeray placed Cooper above Scott, — all, no doubt, from a lack of the quickening touch of sympathy.

As a rule, we have more sympathy with the authors of our own country than with those of another. Few Englishmen can do justice to Victor Hugo, and even to some Frenchmen he is a "gigantic blusterer." It is equally hard for a Frenchman to appreciate Carlyle, and how absurd seems Voltaire's verdict upon Shakespeare, — "a drunken savage"!

The French mind is preeminently a critical mind, yet in France there are and have been as many schools of criticism as of poetry or philosophy or romance. Different types of mind, individual idiosyncrasy, opposing theories and methods, stand out just as clearly in this branch as in any other branch of mental activity. From Madame de Staël down through Barante, Villemain, Nisard, Sainte-Beuve, to Brunetière and the critics of our own day, criticism has been individualistic, and has reflected as many types of mind and points of view as there have been critics. Where shall we look for the final criticism? First it is classicism that rules, then it is romanticism, then naturalism, and next, we are told,

it is to be idealism. Whichever it is, it is true enough when uttered by vital and earnest minds, and serves its purpose. There are many excellences, but where is the supreme excellence? The naturalism of Sainte-Beuve is excellent, the positivism of Nisard is excellent, the classicism of Brunetière is excellent, and the determinism of Taine yields interesting results; but all are relative, all are experimental, all are subject to revision. It is given to no man to have a monopoly of truth. It is given to no poet to have a monopoly of beauty. There is one beauty of Milton, another of Wordsworth, another of Burns, another of Tennyson. To seize upon and draw out the characteristic beauty of each, and give his reader a lively sense of it, is the business of the critic.

VIII

Our reading is a search for the excellent, for the vital and characteristic, which may assume as many and diverse forms in art and literature as it does in life and nature. The savant, the scientist, the moralist, the philosopher, may have pleasure in a work that gives little or no pleasure to the literary artist. Criticism may be looked upon as a search for these various values or various phases of truth, which the critic expresses in terms of his own taste, knowledge, insight, etc., for scientific values, philosophical values, literary and poetic values, or moral and religious values, according to the subject upon

which the critical mind is directed. No two men look for exactly the same values, nor have the same measure of appreciation of them. Emerson and Lowell, for instance, make quite different demands and form different estimates of the poets they read. Lowell lays the emphasis upon the conventional literary values, Emerson more upon spiritual and religious values. An Englishman will find values in the poets of his own country that a Frenchman does not find, and a Frenchman, values in his poets that an Englishman does not find. See how Schérer and Taine handled Milton. Milton's great epic has poetic and literary value, often of a high order, but as philosophy or religion it is grotesque.

IX

Yet let me not seem to underrate the value of what is called judicial criticism. Criticism as an act of judgment, as a disinterested endeavor to see the thing as it is in itself and as it stands related to other things, is justly jealous of our personal tastes and preferences. These tastes and preferences may blind us to the truth. Can we admire above them, or even against them? To cherish no writers but those of our own stripe or mental complexion is the way of the half cultured. Can we rise to a disinterested view? The danger of individualism in letters is caprice, bias, partial views; the danger of intellectualism is the cold, the colorless, the formal.

The ideal critic will blend the two; he will be disinterested and yet sympathetic, individual and yet escape caprice and bias, warm with interest and yet cool with judgment; surrendering himself to his subject and yet not losing himself in it, upholding tradition and yet welcoming new talent, giving the personal equation free play without blurring the light of the impersonal intelligence. From the point of view of intellectualism, criticism seeks to eliminate the personal equation, that which is private and peculiar to us as individuals, and to base criticism upon something like universal principles. What we crave, what our minds literally feed upon, may blind us to the truly excellent. Our *wants* are personal; what we should aim at is an excellence that is impersonal. When we rise to the sphere of the disinterested, we lose sight of our individual tastes and predilections. The question then is, not what we want, not what we have a taste for, but what we are capable of appreciating. Can we appreciate the best? Can we share the universal mind to the extent of delighting in the best that has been known and thought in the world? Emerson said he was always glad to meet people who saw the superiority of Shakespeare to all other poets. If we prefer Pope to Shakespeare, as we are apt to at a certain age, we may know by that that there is an excellence beyond our reach. It is certain that the mass of readers will not appreciate the best literature, but only the second or

third best. A man's æsthetic perceptions may be broadened and educated as well as his intellectual. An unread man feels little interest beyond his own neighborhood, — the personal doings of the men and women he sees and knows. Educate him a little, give him his county paper, and the sphere of his interests is widened; a little more, and he takes an interest in his State; more still, and he broadens out to his whole country; still more, and the whole world is within his sympathy and ken. So in the æsthetic sphere; he gets beyond his personal tastes and wants into the great world currents of literature and art. He can appreciate works written in other ages and lands, and that are quite foreign to his own temperament and outlook. This is to be disinterested. To emancipate the taste is as much as to emancipate the intellect; to rise above one's personal affinities is as much as to rise above one's personal prejudices and superstitions. The boy of a certain stamp has an affinity for the dime novel; if we can lift him to an appreciation of Scott, or Thackeray, or Hawthorne, how have we emancipated his taste! So that Brunetière was right in saying that, in art and literature, the beginning of wisdom is to distrust what we like. *Distrust*, not repudiate. Let us examine first and see upon what grounds we like it, — see if we *ought* to like it; see if it is akin to that which is of permanent value in the world's best thought. A French critic tells a

story of a man who sat cool and unmoved under a sermon that made the people about him shed torrents of tears, and who excused himself by saying, "I do not belong to this parish." One's tastes must be broader than one's parish. I suppose any of our religious brethren would feel a little shy of weeping in the church of a religious denomination not his own. Our religion is no more emancipated than are our tastes. Lowell says there are born Popists and born Wordsworthians; but the more these types can get out of their limitations and appreciate one another, the more they are emancipated.

V

RECENT PHASES OF LITERARY CRITICISM

I

THE criticism of criticism is one of the marked literary characteristics of the last ten or fifteen years, both in this country and in Europe. It is seen in France in Brunetière's essays and in Hennequin's "Scientific Criticism;" in England in the recent work of W. Basil Worsfold on the "Principles of Criticism" and in Mr. John M. Robertson's two volumes of "Essays toward a Critical Method;" in this country in Mr. Howells's "Criticism and Fiction," in Professor Johnson's "Elements of Criticism," and in the still more recent work of Professor Sears on "Methods and Principles of Criticism," besides the numerous discussions of the subject in the magazines and literary journals.

A Western college professor lately discussed some phases of the subject under the head of "Democratic Criticism;" whereupon other college professors raised the voice of protest, one of them asking ironically, Why not have a democratic botany and zoölogy and geology and astronomy? I think it

may be said in reply that, so far as democracy is based upon natural law and means free inquiry, a fair field and no favor, we have these things already. All science is democratic, in the sense that it is no respecter of persons, has no partialities, stops at no arbitrary boundaries, and places all things on an equal footing before natural law. Surely the spirit of science makes directly for democracy. When science shows us that the universe is all made of one stuff, that the celestial laws, as Whitman said, do not need to be worked over and rectified, that inherent power and worth alone finally tell, and that there is not one rule for the heavens above and another for the earth below, it is making smooth the way for democratic ideas and ideals.

Still, pure science is outside the domain of literature, and does not reflect a people's life and character as literature does. It does not hold the mirror of man's imagination up to nature, but resolves nature in the alembic of his understanding. It is not an exponent of personality, as art is, but an index of the development and progress of the impersonal reason. But when we enter the region of the sentiments and the emotions — the subjective world of criticism, literature, art — the case is different. Here we find reflected social and arbitrary distinctions; here we find mirrored the spirit and temper of men as they are acted upon and modified by the social organism and the ideals of different times and races.

A democratic community will have standards of excellence in art and criticism differing from those of an aristocratic community, and will be drawn by different qualities. It seems to me that Dr. Triggs was quite right in saying that a criticism that estimates literary products according to absolute standards, that clings to the past, that cultivates the academic spirit, that is exclusive and unsympathetic, may justly be called aristocratic ; and that a criticism that follows more the comparative method, that adheres to principles instead of to standards, and lays the stress upon the vital and the characteristic in a man's work, rather than upon its form and extrinsic beauty, is essentially democratic.

No doubt the ideal of the monumental works of antiquity is essentially anti-democratic. It was fostered by an exclusive culture. It goes with the idea of the divine right of kings, of a privileged class, and is at war with the spirit of our times. The Catholic tradition in religion and the classical tradition in literature are as foreign to the spirit of democracy as is the monarchical tradition in politics. They are all branches from the same root. The classical tradition begat Milton, but it did not beget Shakespeare, the most marvelous genius of the modern world. To the classic tradition, as it spoke through Voltaire, Shakespeare was a barbarian. Indeed, Shakespeare's art was essentially democratic, how much soever it may have occupied itself with

royal and aristocratic personages. It is as free as an uncaged bird, and pays no tribute to classic models. Its aim is inward movement, fusion, and vitality, rather than outward harmony and proportion. A Greek play is like a Greek temple, — chaste, severe, symmetrical, beautiful. A play of Shakespeare is, as Dr. Johnson long ago suggested, more like a wood or a piece of free nature.

II

Democratic and aristocratic may not be the best terms to apply to the two opposing types of critics, — men like Matthew Arnold or the French critic Ferdinand Brunetière, on the one hand, both the spokesmen of authority in letters; and men like Sainte-Beuve and Anatole France, and the younger generation of English and American critics on the other, men who are more tolerant of individual differences and more inclined to seek the reason of each work within itself. Yet these terms indicate fairly well two profoundly different types.

Brunetière is a militant and dogmatic critic, as we saw by his severe denunciation of Zola while lecturing in this country a few years since. One of his eulogists speaks of him as the "autocrat of triumphant convictions." Of democratic blood in his veins there is very little. He reflects the old orthodox and aristocratic spirit in his dictum that nature is not to be trusted; that both in taste and in morals

what comes natural to us and gives us pleasure is, for that very reason, to be avoided. Nature is depraved. In morals, would we attain to virtue, we must go counter to her; and in art and literature, would we attain to wisdom, we must distrust what we like. This suspicion of nature was the keynote of the old theology, which found its authority in a miraculous revelation, and it is the keynote of the old Aristotelian criticism, which found its authority in a body of rules deduced from the masters. The new theology looks for a scientific basis for its morals, or seeks for the sanction of nature herself; and democratic criticism aims to stand upon the same basis, and cleaves to principles and not to standards, not by yielding to the caprices of uninformed taste, but by seeking the law and test of every work within itself. We no longer judge of the worth of a man by his creed, but by what he is in and of himself; by his natural virtues and aptitudes; and we no longer condemn a work of art because it breaks with the old traditions.

Arnold was of similar temper with Brunetière. His elements of style are "dignity and distinction," a part of the classic tradition, a survival from the feudal and aristocratic world, from a literature of courts and courtiers, as distinguished from a literature of the people, a democratic literature. Distinction of utterance, distinction of manners, distinction of dress and equipage — they are all of a piece, and

adhere in the aristocratic and monarchical ideal. The special antipathy of this ideal is the common, all commonness is vulgar. When Arnold came to this country and became interested in the lives of Grant and Lincoln, he found them both wanting in distinction, — there was no savor of the aristocratic in their words or manners. And the criticism is true. From all accounts, Grant presented a far less distinguished appearance at Appomattox than did Lee; and Lincoln was easily outshone in aristocratic graces by some members of his cabinet. Indeed, the predominant quality of the two men was their immense commonness. Washington and Jefferson came much nearer the aristocratic ideal. Lincoln and Grant both had greatness of the first order, but their type was democratic and not aristocratic. The aristocratic ideal of excellence embraces other qualities; there is more pride, more exclusiveness in it; it holds more by traditions and special privileges. Lincoln had less distinction than Sumner or Chase, Grant less than Sherman or Lee, but each had an excellence the others had not. The choice, the refined, the cultured, belong to one class of excellencies: the qualities of Lincoln and Grant belong to another and more fundamental kind. Arnold himself had distinction, — he had urbanity, lucidity, proportion, and many other classic virtues, — but he had not breadth, sympathy, heartiness, commonness. The quality of distinction, an air of some-

thing choice, high-bred, superfine, will doubtless count for less and less in a country like ours. In literature and in character we are looking for other values, for the true, the vital, the characteristic. There is nothing in life or character more winsome than commonness wedded to great excellence; the ordinary crowned with the extraordinary, as in Lincoln the man, Socrates the philosopher, Burns or Wordsworth the poet. Distinction wins admiration, commonness wins love. The note of equality, the democratic note, is much more pronounced in Browning than in Tennyson, in Shelley than in Arnold, in Wordsworth than in Milton, and it is more pronounced in American poets than in English. In times and for a people like ours, the suggestion of something hearty and heroic in letters is more needed than the suggestion of something fine and exquisite. Distinction is not to be confounded with dignity or elevation, which flourishes more or less in all great peoples. A common laboring man may show great dignity, but never distinction. Dignity often shone in the speeches of the old Indian chiefs, but not distinction, as the term is here used.

The more points at which a man touches his fellow man, the more democratic he is. The breadth of his relation to the rest of the world, that is the test. Sainte-Beuve was more truly a democratic critic than is Brunetière. The democratic producer

in literature will differ from the aristocratic less in his standards of excellence than in the atmosphere of human equality and commonness which he effuses. We are too apt to associate the common with the vulgar. There is the commonness of a Lincoln or a Grant, and there is the commonness of the lower strata of society. There is the commonness of earth, air, and water, and there is the commonness of dust and mud; the commonness of the basic and the universal, and the commonness of the cheap and tawdry. Grant's calmness, self-control, tenacity of purpose, modesty, comprehensiveness of mind, were uncommon in degree, not in kind. He was the common soldier with extraordinary powers added, but the common soldier was always visible. So with Lincoln, — his greatness was inclusive, not exclusive.

III

So far as good taste means "good form," and so far as good form is established by social and conventional usages of the fashionable world, the poet of democracy has little to do with it. But so far as it is based upon the inherent fitness of things and the health and development of the best there is in a man, so far is he bound to enlist himself in its service. In a world where everybody is educated and reads books, much poor literature will circulate; but will not the good, the best, circulate also? Will there

not be the few good judges, the saving remnant? Is there not as much good taste and right reason now in England or France as during more rigidly monarchical times?

The ideal democracy is not the triumph of barbarism or the riot of vulgarity, but it is the triumph of right reason and natural equality and inequality. Some things are better than others, better from the point of view of the whole of life. These better things we must cling to and make much of in a democracy, as in an aristocracy. We must aspire to the best that is known and thought in the world. This best a privileged class seeks to appropriate to itself; a democracy seeks to share it with all. All are not capable of receiving it, but all may try. They will be better able to-morrow if they have the chance to-day. We must not ignore the vulgarity, the bad taste incident to democratic conditions. If we do, we never get rid of them. Political equality brings to the foreground many unhandsome human traits, the loud, the mediocre, the insolent, etc. All the more must we fix attention upon the true, the noble, the heroic, the disinterested. The rule of temperance, of good taste, of right reason, antedates any and every social condition. Democracy cannot abrogate fundamental principles. The essential conditions of life are not changed, but arbitrary, accidental conditions are modified. One still needs food and raiment and shelter and transportation; he is still

subject to the old hindrances and discouragements within himself.

We must give the terms good taste, right reason a broader scope; that is all. The principles of good taste when applied to art are not fixed and absolute, like those of mathematics or the exact sciences. They are vital and elastic. They imply a certain fitness and consistency. Shakespeare shocked the classic taste of the French critics. He violated the unities and mixed prose and poetry. But what was good taste in Shakespeare — that is, in keeping with his spirit and aim — might be bad taste in Racine. What is permissible to an elemental poet like Whitman would jar in a refined poet like Longfellow. But bad taste in Whitman, that is, things not in keeping with the ideal he has before him, jar the same as in any other poet. He has many lines and passages and whole poems that set the teeth of many readers on edge, that are yet in perfect keeping with his plan and spirit. They go with the poet of the Cosmos, but not with the poet of the drawing-room or library. My taste is not shocked, but my courage is challenged.

In Whitman's case the appeal is not so directly and exclusively to our æsthetic perceptions as it is in most other poets; he is elemental where they are cultured and artificial; at the same time he can no more escape æsthetic principles than they can. Because a flower, a gem, or a well-kept lawn is beau-

tiful, we are not compelled to deny beauty to rocks, trees, and mountains. If Whitman does not, in his total effects, attain to something like this kind of beauty, he is not a poet.

IV

I have said that Sainte-Beuve was more truly a democratic critic than is M. Brunetière. He is more tolerant of individualism in letters. He called himself a naturalist of minds. His main interest in each work was in what was most individual and characteristic in it. He was inclusive rather than exclusive, less given to positive judgments, but more to sympathetic interpretation. He united the method of Darwin to the sensibility of the artist. Critics like Arnold and Brunetière uphold the classic and academic traditions. They are aristocratic because they are the spokesmen of an exclusive culture. They derive from Catholicism more than from Protestantism; they uphold authority rather than encourage individuality in life and letters. In criticism they aim at that intellectual disinterestedness which is indeed admirable, and which has given the world such noble results, but which seems unsuited to the genius of our time. Ours is a democratic century, a Protestant century. Individualism has been the dominant note in literature. The men of power, for the most part, have not been the disinterested, but the interested men, the men of convic-

tion and of more or less partial views, who have not so much aimed to see the thing as it is in itself as they have aimed to make others see it as they saw it. In other words, they have been preachers, doctrinaires, men bent upon the dissemination of particular ideas.

One has only to run over the list of the foremost names in literature for the past seventy-five years. There is Tolstoi, in Russia, clearly one of the great world writers, but a doctrinaire through and through. There are Renan, Victor Hugo, Taine, Thiers, Guizot, in France; Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Ruskin, Newman, Huxley, George Eliot, Mrs. Ward, in English literature, and in American literature Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau. All these writers had aims ulterior to those of pure literature. They were not disinterested observers and recorders. They obtruded their personal opinions and convictions. They are the writers with a message. Their thoughts spring from some special bent or experience, and address themselves to some special mood or want. They wrote the books that help us, that often come to us as revelations; works of art, it may be, but of art in subjection to moral conviction, and they are directed to other than purely æsthetic ends. They gave expression to their individual tastes and predilections; they were more or less tethered to their own egos; they may be called the personal authors, as their predecessors may be called the im-

personal. They are not of the pure breed of men of letters, but represent crosses of various kinds, as the cross of the artist with the thinker, the savant, the theologian, the man of science, the reformer, the preacher. These personal authors belong to the modern world rather than to the ancient; to a time of individualism rather than to a time of institutionalism; to an industrial and democratic age, rather than to an imperial and military age.

Modern life is undoubtedly becoming more and more impersonal in the sense that it favors less and less the growth and preservation of great personalities, yet its utilitarian spirit, its tendency to specialization, its right of private judgment, and its religious doubts and unrest, find their outcome in individualism in literature. The disinterested critics and recorders are still among us, but power has departed from them. The age is too serious, the questions are too pressing. The man of genius is no longer at ease in Zion. If he rises at all above the masses, he must share the burden of thought and conscience of his times. This burden may hinder the free artistic play of his powers, as it probably has in most of the writers I have mentioned, yet it will greatly deepen the impression his words will make. The saying "Art for art's sake" cannot be impeached. even by Tolstoi. When rightly understood, it is true. Art would live in the whole, and not in the part called morals or religion, or even beauty. But

its exponents in our day have been, with few exceptions, of a feeble type, men of words and fancies like Swinburne or Poe. In Tennyson we have as pure a specimen of artistic genius as in Shakespeare, but a far less potent one. His power comes when he thrills and vibrates with some special thought or cry of his time. With the great swarms of our minor poets the complaint is, not that the type is not pure, but that the inspiration is feeble. They have more art than nature. It is the same with the novelists. Since Hawthorne and Thackeray the pure artistic gift has no longer been the endowment of great or profound personalities. George Eliot, Mrs. Ward, Tolstoi, all interested writers, all with aims foreign to pure art, are the names of power in our half of the century. Henry James is a much finer artist, but he has nothing like their hold upon the great common elements of human life. The disinterested writer gives us a higher, more unselfish pleasure than the type I am considering; we are compelled to rise more completely out of ourselves to meet him. I am only insisting that in our day he has little penetration, and that the men of power have been of the other class.

I have placed Taine among the interested critics; he was interested in putting through certain ideas; he had a thesis to uphold; he will not value all truths equally, he will take what suits him. Like all men with preconceived ideas, his mind was more

like a searchlight than like a lamp. This makes him stimulating as a critic, but not always satisfying.

The same is true of our own Emerson, probably our most stimulating and fertilizing mind thus far. Lowell, as a man of letters, is of a much purer strain; he is in the direct line of succession of the great literary names, yet the value of his contribution undoubtedly falls far short of that of Emerson. As a poet, Emerson was a poor singer with wonderfully penetrating tones, almost unequaled in this respect. The same may be said of him as a critic; he was a poor critic with a wonderfully penetrating glance. He had the hawk's eye for the game he was looking for; he could see it amid any tangle of woods or thicket of the commonplace. His special limitation is that he was looking for a particular kind of prey. His sympathies were narrow but intense. The elective affinities were very active in his criticism. He loved Emersonian poetry, he loved the Emersonian paradoxes, he valued the wild æolian tones; he delighted in the word that gave the prick and sting of the electric spark; abruptness, surprise, the sudden, intense, forked sentence — these took him, these he dealt in. His survey of any man or matter is never a complete one, never a disinterested one, never done in the scientific spirit. He writes about representative men, and exploits Plato, Goethe, Montaigne, etc., in relation to his thought. He is always on quests for particular ideas, in search for

Emersonian values. He will not do justice to such poets as Poe and Shelley, but he will do more than justice to Donne and Herbert; he finds in them what he sets out to find; it is a partial view, but it is penetrating and valuable; it is not criticism, and does not set out to be; it is a suggestive study of kindred souls. Emerson's work is kindling and inspiring; it unsettles rather than settles; it is not a lamp to guide your feet, it is a star to give you your bearings.

Carlyle and Ruskin fall into the same category. They sin against the classic virtues of repose, proportion, serenity, but this makes their penetrating power all the greater. Carlyle cannot rank with the great impartial historians, yet as a painter of historical characters and scenes the vividness and reality of his pictures are almost unequaled. Carlyle lacked the disinterestedness of the true artist. He had great power of description and characterization, but he could not as an historian stand apart from his subject as the great Greek and Roman historians do. He is a portion of all that he sees and describes. He is bent upon persuasion quite as much as upon portrayal. He could not succeed as a novelist or a poet, because of his vehement, intolerant nature. He succeeds as an historian only in portraying men in whom he sees the lineaments of his own character, as in Cromwell. He did not or could not live in the whole, as did his master, Goethe. His mind was

a steep incline. His opinions were like mountain torrents. Arnold, in one of his letters, complained that in his criticism of Goethe there was too much of *engouement*, — too much, I suppose, of the fondness of the gourmand for a particular dish, or of the toper for his favorite tipple. His enthusiasm was intemperate, and therefore unsound. Doubtless some such objection as this may be urged against most of Carlyle's criticisms. He was ruled by his character more than by his intellect; his feeling guided his vision. If he is not always a light to the reason, he is certainly an electric excitant to the imagination and the moral sense. In his essays, pamphlets, histories, we hardly get judicial estimates of things; rather do we get overestimates or underestimates. Yet always is there something that kindles and brings the blood to the surface. Carlyle will beget a stronger race than Arnold, but it will not be so cool and clear-headed. Emerson will fertilize more minds with new thought than Lowell, but there will be many more cranks and fanatics and hobbyists among them.

Professor Dowden says Landor falls below Shelley and Wordsworth because he had no divine message or oracle to deliver to the men of his generation, — no authentic word of the Lord to utter. Landor had great thoughts, but they were not of first-rate importance with reference to his times. He was more thoroughly imbued with the classic spirit than either

Shelley or Wordsworth, and the classic spirit is at ease in Zion. The modern world differs from the ancient in its moral stress and fervor. This moral stress and fervor both Shelley and Wordsworth shared, but Landor did not. Where would the world be in thought, in works, in civilization, had there been no one-sided, overloaded, fanatical men, — men of partial views, of half-truths, of one idea? Where would Christianity have been, under the play of disinterested intellect, without disciples, without devotees, without saints and martyrs, without its Paul and its Luther, without prejudice, without superstition, without inflexibility?

We might fitly contrast these two types of mind under the heads of Protestant and Catholic, the one personal, the other impersonal. With the Protestant type goes individualism, which, as I have said, is so marked a feature of the modern world. With the Catholic type goes institutionalism, which was so marked a feature of the ancient world. With the former goes the right of private judgment, innovation, progress, new forms of art; with the latter goes authority, obedience, the power of the past. The Protestant type is more capricious and willful; it is restless, venturesome, impatient of rules and precedents; the older type is more serene, composed, conservative, orderly. In criticism it is more objective; it upholds the standards, it lays down the law; it cherishes the academic spirit. The French mind

is the more Catholic; the English the more Protestant. In literature the Protestant type is the more subjective and creative; it makes new discoveries, it founds new orders. Catholicism is exterior, formal, imposing; it takes little account of personal needs and peculiarities, while Protestantism is almost entirely concerned with the private, interior world. Individualism in religion begat Protestantism, and upon Protestantism it begat the numerous progeny of the sects, the thousand and one isms that now divide the religious world. To this spirit religion is something personal and private to every man, and in no sense a matter of forms and rituals. In fact, individualism fairly confronts institutionalism. This spirit carried into the region of æsthetics or literature gives rise to like results, — to a freer play of personal taste and preferences, to more intense individual utterances, to new and unique types of artistic genius, and to new lines of activity in the æsthetic field.

Another name for it is the democratic spirit. Its special dangers are the crude, the odd, the capricious, just as the danger of institutionalism is the coldly formal, the lifeless, the traditional. In English literature the former begat Shakespeare, as it did Tupper; the latter begat Milton, as it did Young and Pollock. With institutionalism goes the divine right of kings, the sacredness of priests, the authority of forms and ceremonies, and the slavery of the masses;

with individualism goes the divinity of man, the sacredness of life, the right of private judgment, the decay of traditions and forms, and the birth of the modern spirit. With one goes stateliness, impressiveness, distinction, as well as the empty, the moribund, the despotic; with the other goes force, strenuousness, originality, as well as the loud, the amorphous, the fanatical.

V

Goethe said that a loving interest in the person and the works of an author, amounting to a certain one-sided enthusiasm, alone led to reality in criticism; all else was vanity. No doubt more will come of the contact of two minds under these circumstances than from what is called the judicial attitude; there will be more complete fusion and interpenetration; without a certain warmth and passion there is no fruitfulness, even in criticism. In the field of art and literature, to be disinterested does not mean to be cold and judicial; it means to be free from bias, free from theories and systems, with mind open to receive a clear impression of the work's characteristic merits and qualities.

It is tradition that always stands in the way of the new man. In politics, it is the political tradition; in religion, the religious tradition; and in literature, the literary tradition. Professional criticism is the guardian of the literary tradition, and this is

why any man who essays a new departure in literary art has reason to fear criticism or despise it, as the case may be.

It is when we take up any new work in the judicial spirit, bent upon judging and classifying, rather than upon enjoying and understanding, the conscious analytical intellect on duty and the sympathies and the intuitions under lock and key, that there is danger that judicial blindness will fall upon us. When we approach nature in the spirit of technical science, our minds already preoccupied with certain conclusions and systems, do we get as much of the joy and stimulus which she holds for us as do the children on the way to school of a spring morning with their hands full of wild flowers, or as does the gleesome saunterer over hills in summer with only love and appreciation uppermost in his mind?

Professional criticism often becomes mere pedagogical narrowness and hardness; it gets crushed over with rules and precedents, pinched and sterilized by routine and convention, so that a new work makes no impression upon it. The literary tradition, like the religious tradition, ceases to be vital and formative.

Is it not true that all first-class works have to be approached with a certain humility and free giving of one's self? In a sense, "except ye become as little children" ye cannot enter the kingdom of the great books.

I suppose that to get at the true inwardness of any imaginative work, we must read it as far as possible in its own spirit, and that if it does not engraft and increase its own spirit upon us, then it is feeble and may easily be brushed aside.

Criticism which has for its object the discovery of new talent and, in Sainte-Beuve's words, to "apportion to each kind of greatness its due influence and superiority," is one thing; and criticism the object of which is to uphold and enforce the literary tradition, is quite another. Consciously or unconsciously, when the trained reader opens a new book he is under the influence of one or the other of these notions, — either he submits himself to it disinterestedly, intent only upon seizing and appreciating its characteristic quality, or he comes prepossessed with certain rules and standards upon which his taste has been formed. In other words, he comes to the new work simply as a man, a human being seeking edification, or he comes clothed in some professional authority, seeking judgment.

Our best reading is a search for the excellent; but what is the excellent? Is there any final standard of excellence in literature? Each may be excellent after its kind, but kinds differ. There is one excellence of Milton and Arnold and the classic school, and another excellence of Shakespeare and Pope and Burns and Wordsworth and Whitman, or of the romantic and democratic school. The critic

is to hold a work up to its own ideal or standard. Of the perfect works, or the works that aim at perfection, at absolute symmetry and proportion, appealing to us through the cunning of their form, scheme, structure, details, ornamentation, we make a different demand from the one we make of a primitive, unique, individual utterance or expression of personality like "Leaves of Grass," in which the end is not form, but life; not perfection, but suggestion; not intellect, but character; not beauty, but power; not carving, or sculpture, or architecture, but the building of a man.

It is no doubt a great loss to be compelled to read any work of literary art in a conscious critical mood, because the purely intellectual interest in such a work which criticism demands, is far less satisfying than our æsthetic interest. The mood in which we enjoy a poem is analogous to that in which it was conceived. We have here the reason why the professional reviewer is so apt to miss the characteristic quality of the new book, and why the readers of great publishing houses make so many mistakes. They call into play a conscious mental force that is inimical to the emotional mood in which the work had its rise; what was love in the poet becomes a pale intellectual reflection in the critic.

Love must come first, or there can be no true criticism; the intellectual process must follow and be begotten by an emotional process. Indeed, criti-

cism is an afterthought; it is such an account as we can give of the experience we have had in private communion with the subject of it. The conscious analytical intellect takes up one by one, and examines the impression made upon our subconsciousness by the new poem or novel.

Where nothing has been sown, nothing can be reaped. The work that has yielded us no enjoyment will yield us no positive results in criticism. Dr. Louis Waldstein, in his suggestive work on "The Subconscious Self," discovers that the critical or intellectual mood is foreign to art; that it destroys or decreases the spontaneity necessary to creation. This is why the critical and the creative faculty so rarely go together, or why one seems to work against the other. Probably in all normal, well-balanced minds the appreciation of a work of the imagination is a matter of feeling and intuition long before it is a matter of intellectual cognizance. Not all minds can give a reason for the faith that is in them, and it is not important that they should; the main matter is the faith. Every great work of art will be found upon examination to have an ample ground of critical principles to rest upon, though in the artist's own mind not one of these principles may have been consciously defined.

Indeed, the artist who works from any theory is foredoomed to at least partial failure. And art that lends itself to any propaganda, or to any idea "out-

side its essential form, falls short of being a pure art creation."

The critical spirit, when it has hardened into fixed standards, is always a bar to the enjoyment or understanding of a poet. One then has a poetical creed, as he has a political or religious creed, and this creed is likely to stand between him and the appreciation of a new poetic type. Macaulay thought Leigh Hunt was barred from appreciating his "Lays of Ancient Rome" by his poetical creed, which may have been the case. Jeffrey was no doubt barred from appreciating Wordsworth by his poetical creed. It was Byron's poetical creed that led him to rank Pope so highly. A critic who holds to one of the conflicting creeds about fiction, either that it should be realistic or romantic, will not do justice to the other type. If Tolstoi is his ideal, he will set little value on Scott; or if he exalts Hawthorne, he will depreciate Howells. What the disinterested observer demands is the best possible work of each after its kind. Or, if he is to compare and appraise the two kinds, then I think that without doubt his conclusion will be that the realistic novel is the later, maturer growth, more in keeping with the modern demand for reality in all fields, and that the romantic belongs more to the world of childish things, which we are fast leaving behind us.

Our particular predilections in literature must, no doubt, be carefully watched. There is danger in

personal absorption in an author, — danger to our intellectual freedom. One would not feel for a poet the absorbing and exclusive love that the lover feels for his mistress, because one would rather have the whole of literature for his domain. One would rather admire Rabelais with Sainte-Beuve, as a Homeric buffoon, than be a real "Pantagruelist devotee," who finds a flavor even in "the dregs of Master François's cask" that he prefers to all others. No doubt some of us, goaded on by the opposite vice in readers and critics, have been guilty of an intemperate enthusiasm toward Whitman and Browning. To make a cult of either of these authors, or of any other, is to shut one's self up in a part when the whole is open to him. The opposite vice, that of violent personal antipathy, is equally to be avoided in criticism. Probably Sainte-Beuve was guilty of this vice in his attitude toward Balzac, Schérer in his criticism of Béranger, and Landor in his dislike of Dante. One might also cite Emerson's distaste for Poe and Shelley, and Arnold's antipathy to Victor Hugo's poetry. Likes and dislikes in literature that are temperamental, that are like the attraction or repulsion of bodies in different electrical conditions, are hard to be avoided, but the trained reader may hope to overcome them. Taste is personal, but the intellect is, or should be, impersonal, and to be able to guide the former by the light of the latter is the signal triumph of criticism.

VI

"THOU SHALT NOT PREACH"

After Reading Tolstoi on "What is Art?"

THERE is one respect in which pure art and pure science agree: both are disinterested, and seek the truth, each of its kind, for its own sake; neither has any axe to grind. Both would live in the whole, — one through reason and investigation, the other through imagination and contemplation. Science seeks to understand the universe, art to enjoy it. A man of pure science like Darwin is as disinterested as a great artist like Shakespeare. He has no practical or secondary ends; the truth alone is his quest. He is tracing the footsteps of creative energy through organic nature. He is like a detective working up a case. His theory about it is only provisional, for the moment. Every fact is welcome to him, and the more it seems to tell against his theory of the case, the more eagerly he weighs it and studies it. Indeed, the man of science follows an ideal as truly as does the poet, and will pass by fortune, honors, and all worldly success, to cleave to it. Tolstoi thinks that science for science' sake is as bad as art for art's

sake; but is not knowledge a reward in itself, and is there any higher good than that mastery of the intellect over the problems of the universe which science gives? By bending science to particular and secondary ends we lay the basis of our material civilization, but it is still true that the final end of science is, not our material benefit, but our mental enlightenment; nor is the highest end of art the good which the preacher and the moralist seek to give us. A poem of Milton's or Tennyson's carries its own proof, its own justification. When we demand a message of the poet, or of any artist, outside of himself, outside of the truth which he unconsciously conveys through his own personality and point of view, we degrade his art, or destroy that disinterestedness which is its crown. Art exists for ideal ends; it looks askance at devotees, at doctrinaires, at all men engaged in the dissemination of particular ideas. I am not now thinking of art as mere craft, but as the province of man's freest, most spontaneous, most joyous, most complete soul activity, — the kind of activity that has no other end, seeks no other reward, than it finds in or of itself, the joy of being and beholding, the free play of creative energy. Art does not rebuke vice, it depicts it; it does not urge reform, it shows us the reformers. Its work is play, its lesson is an allegory. The preacher works by selection and exclusion, the artist by inclusion and contrast.

When the resources of literary art are enlisted in

any propaganda, in the dissemination of particular ideas or doctrines, or when the end is moral or scientific or political or philosophical, and not æsthetic, the result is a mixed product, a cross between literature and something else, which may be very vigorous and serviceable, but which cannot give the kind of satisfaction that is imparted by a pure artistic creation. A great poem or work of art does not speak to any special and passing condition, mental or spiritual; its ministrations are neither those of meat nor those of medicine; it does not subserve any private or secondary ends, even the saving of our souls. The books that seem written for us are quite certain to lose in interest to the next generation. A great poem heals, not as the doctor heals, but as nature does, by bringing the conditions of health. It consoles, not as the priest consoles, but as love and life themselves do. It does not offer a special good, but a general benefaction.

I once heard Emerson quote with approval Shakespeare's saying, "Read what you most affect;" but no doubt a broad culture demands wide reading, and that we be on our guard against our particular predilections, because such predilections may lead us into narrow channels. Do the devotees of Browning, those who cry Browning, Browning, and Browning only, do him the highest honor? Do the disciples of Whitman, who would make a cult of him, live in the spirit of the whole, as Whitman himself tried to

live? — Whitman, who said that there may be any number of Supremes, and that the chief lesson to be learned under the master is how to destroy him? Our love for an author must not suggest the fondness of the epicure for a special dish, or partake of the lover's infatuation for his mistress. Infatuation is not permissible in literature. If art does not make us free of the whole, it fails of its purpose. Only the religious bigot builds upon specific texts, and only the one-sided, half-formed mind sees life through the eyes of a single author. In the æsthetic sphere one may serve many masters; he may give himself to none. One of the latest and most mature perceptions that comes to us is the perception of relativity, in art as well as in all other matters.

With respect to this question, both readers and writers may be divided into two classes, the interested and the disinterested, — those who are seeking special and personal ends, and those who are seeking general, universal ends.

The poet is best pleased with the disinterested readers and admirers of his work; that is, with those who take to it on the broadest human grounds, and not upon grounds merely personal to themselves. Thus Longfellow will find a wider and more disinterested audience than Whittier, because his Muse is less in the service of special ideas; he looks at life less as a Quaker and a Puritan, and more as a man.

The special ideas of an age, its moral enthusiasms and revolts, give place to other ideas and enthusiasms, which in their turn give place to others; but there are certain currents of thought and emotion that are perennial, certain experiences common to all men and peoples. Such a poem as Gray's Elegy, for instance, is filled with the breadth of universal human life. On the other hand, such a work as Schiller's "Robbers," or Goethe's "Werther," seems to us like an empty shell picked up on the shore, the life entirely gone out of it. One can see why Poe is looked upon by foreign critics as outranking any of our more popular New England poets. It is because his work has more of the ubiquitous character of true art, is less pledged to moral and special ends, less the result of personal tastes and attractions, and more the pure flame of the unpledged æsthetic nature. The "Raven" and the "Bells" have that play, that scorn of personal ends, that potential spiritual energy, of great art. Poe does not increase our stock of ideas or widen the sphere of our sympathies. He was a conjurer with words. As a poet he used language for the music he could evoke from it. What is the mental content of his "Annabel Lee"? It is as vague and shadowy as its angels and demons, its sepulchres and seraphim, and its kingdom by the sea.

Is it Coleridge who tells of an artist who always copied his wife's legs in his pictures, and thereby

won great fame? The creative touch it is that marks the artist. He smites the rock, and a fountain gushes forth. Tennyson has the artist nature in greater measure than Wordsworth, a more flexible receptive spirit, though he never attains to the homely pathos or the moral grandeur of the latter. Yet individual convictions and attractions played a less part in his poetry. Wordsworth gathered the harvest of his own feelings and experiences, Tennyson that of other men as well. One reaped only where he had sown, the other where all men had sown. One is colored by Westmoreland, the other by the whole of England. Wordsworth wrote more from character and natural bias than Tennyson. What nature does with a man, — that is no credit to him; but what he does with nature. If his character inspired the poem, is it not less than if his imagination had inspired it? What a man does out of and independent of himself, or the degree in which he transcends his own experience and partialities and rises into universal relations, — is not that the measure of him as an artist? If I tell only what I know, what I have felt, what I have seen, no matter how well I do it, that is not to come into the sphere the artist dwells in. What Wordsworth writes is more personal to himself, more out of his own life, than what Tennyson writes. He is more limited by his temperament and natural bias than Tennyson is by

his. His word is more inevitable, more the word of fate, but is it not therefore less the word of art? Be sincere, be sincere; be not too sincere, lest you substitute a moral rigidity for the flexibility demanded by art. The artist is never the slave of his sincerity.

Graphic power is only a minor part of artistic power. One can say what one has felt, and tell what one has experienced; but the artist can tell what he has not experienced, and say what he has not felt. He can make the assumed, the imaginary, real to himself and to his reader. He can depict the passion of love, of anger, of remorse, though he may never have felt them. Many persons have written one good novel, but not a second, because in the first they exhausted their experience; to transcend that is denied them. True art will have many messages and many morals, as life and nature have, but we must draw them out for ourselves. They do not lead, they follow; they do not make the argument, they are made by it. Let us repeat and re-repeat. Art makes us free of the whole, — not art for craft's sake, but art as implying the entire sphere of man's spontaneous æsthetic activity. Beauty is indeed its own excuse for being. Literature is an end in and of itself, as much as music is or religion is. Or are we religious only upon pay? What message has a bird, a flower, a summer day, frost, rain, wind, snow? There are sermons in stones — when we put them

there. What message has Shakespeare, Milton, Dante, Virgil, or any true poet? The message we have the power to draw from him, and no two of us will draw the same. Art is a circle; it is complete within itself; it returns forever upon itself. There is no great poetry without great ideas, and yet the ideas must exist as impulse, will, emotion, and not lie upon the surface as formulas. The enemies of art are reflection, special ideas, conscious intellectual processes, because these things isolate us and shut us off from the life of the whole, — from that which we reach through our sentiments and emotions. The æsthetic mood, says the author of "The Subconscious Self," "is, in its essence, receptive, contemplative, distinctly personal, and therefore free from purpose and conscious selection." "Whenever a work of art is the vehicle for an idea or purpose outside of its essential form, it falls short of being a pure art creation, and fails in its appeal to the æsthetic mood, whilst, be it conceded, it may serve some other but secondary purpose, which belongs to the province of the archæologist, the art historian, and the collector," and, we may add, the moralist and preacher. Wordsworth's poet was content if he "might enjoy the things that others understood," and this is always characteristic of the poetic mood. Absorption, contemplation, enjoyment, and not criticism and reflection, are as the air it breathes. Byron was a great poet, but, said Goethe, "the mo-

ment he reflects, he is a child." It is better that the poet should not be a child when he reflects, but it is much more important that he be a child when he feels. His power as a poet does not lie in the reflective faculties, but in the direct, joyous, solvent power of his spirit.

We do not find our individual selves in great art, but the humanity of which we are partakers. Something is brought home to us; but not to our partialities, rather to our higher selves. We are never so little selfish and hampered by our individualism as when admiring a great work of the imagination. No doubt our modern world calls for doctors of the soul in a sense that the more healthful and joyous pagan world had no need of. Still, so far as the poet is a doctor or a priest, so far does he fail to live in the spirit of the whole.

It is, I think, in these or similar considerations that we are to look for the justification of the phrase, now almost everywhere disputed, "Art for art's sake." It is only saying that art is to have no partial or secondary ends, but is to breathe forth the spirit of the whole. It must be disinterested; it is to hold the mirror up to nature. It may hold the mirror up to the vices and follies of the age, but must not take sides. It represents; it does not judge. The matter is self-judged in the handling of the true artist. Didactic poetry or didactic fiction can never rank high. Thou shalt not preach or teach; thou

shalt portray and create, and have ends as universal as has nature.

Our moral teachers and preachers often fail to see that the first condition of a work of pure art is that it be disinterested, that it be a total and complete product in and of itself; and that it is its own excuse for being. Its business is to represent, to portray, or, as Aristotle has it, to imitate nature, and not to preach or to moralize. Our ethical and religious writers and speakers are apt to call this artistic disinterestedness indifferentism. If the novelist does not openly and avowedly take sides with his good characters against his bad, or if, as Taine declares his function to be, he contents himself with representing them to us as they are, whole, not blaming, not punishing, not mutilating, transferring them to us intact and separate, and leaving "us the right of judging if we desire it," — if this is his attitude, says the Rev. Washington Gladden in his late brochure on "Art and Morality," he is guilty of indifferentism. "His work begins to be the work of a malefactor, and he himself is preparing to be fit company for fiends." Mr. Gladden misapprehends Taine, whom he quotes, and he misapprehends the spirit and method of art. If the artist does really convey to us the impression that he is personally indifferent as to which triumphs in life, good or evil, and that he is as well pleased with the one as with

the other, then he is culpable and merits this harsh language.

What art demands is that the artist's personal convictions and notions, his likes and dislikes, do not obtrude themselves at all; that good and evil stand judged in his work by the logic of events, as they do in nature, and not by any special pleading on his part. He does not hold a brief for either side; he exemplifies the working of the creative energy. He is neither a judge nor an advocate; he is a witness on the stand; he tells how the thing fell out, and the more impartial he is as a witness, the better. We, the jury, shall watch carefully for any bias or leaning on his part. We shall try his testimony by the rules of evidence; in this case, by our acquaintance with other imaginative works and by our experience of life. The great artist works in and through and from moral ideas; his works are indirectly a criticism of life. He is moral without having a moral. The moment a moral or an immoral intention obtrudes itself, that moment he begins to fall from grace as an artist. He confesses his inability to let nature speak for herself. He is inadequate to the logic of events, and gives us a logic of his own. Shakespeare is our highest type of the disinterested artist. Does he do aught but hold the mirror up to nature? Is his work overlaid with an avowed moral intention? Does he go behind the returns, so to speak? Does he tamper with the logic of events,

the fate of character? What is the moral of "Hamlet"? Has any one yet found out? Yet the plays all fall within the scope of moral ideas; they treat moral ideas with energy and depth, as Voltaire said of English poetry in general.

We must discriminate between a conscious moral purpose and an unconscious moral impulse. A work of art arises primarily out of the emotions, and not out of the intellect, and is sound and true to the extent to which it repeats the method of nature. Ruskin, whom Mr. Gladden quotes, was of course right when he said that the art of a nation is an exponent of its ethical state. But the condition of first importance with the artist is, not that he should have an ethical purpose, but that he should be ethically sound. He may work with ethical ideas, but not directly for them. The preacher speaks for them; the poet speaks out of them, — he plays with them, he takes his will of them; they follow, but do not lead him. Again, Ruskin says, "He is the greatest artist who has embodied in the sum of his works the greatest number of the greatest ideas;" but he is an artist only by virtue of having embodied these ideas in an imaginative form. If they run through his work as homilies or intellectual propositions, or lie upon it as moral reflections, they are not within the vital sphere of art.

Art is not thought, but will, impulse, intuition; not ideas, but ideality. None knew this better than

Ruskin. No great artist can be cornered with the question, "What for?" What is creation for? What are you and I for? The catechism answers promptly enough, and the artist does not contradict it. But of necessity his answer is not so dogmatic; or rather, he does not give a direct answer at all, but lets the epitome of life which he brings answer for him. He is not to exhibit the forces of life harnessed to a purpose and tilling some man's private domain, but he is to show them in spontaneous play and fusion, obeying no law but their own, and working to universal ends. His work is finally for our edification. If it be also for our reproof, he must conceal his purpose so well that we do not suspect it. He must let the laws of life alone speak for him. Sainte-Beuve has a passage bearing upon this subject which is admirable. He had been censured as a critic for being too lax in his dealings with the morality of works of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Let me quote his reply: "If there are some readers (and I think I know some) who would prefer to see me censure it oftener and more roundly, I beg them to observe that I succeed much better by provoking them to condemn it themselves than by taking the lead and seeming to try to impose a judgment of my own every time. In the long run, if a critic does this (or an artist either), he always wearies and offends his readers. They like to feel themselves more severe than the critic. I leave them that plea-

sure. For me, it is enough if I represent and depict things faithfully, so that every one may profit from the intellectual substance and the good language, and be in a position to judge for himself the other, wholly moral parts. There, however, I am careful not to be crucial." French art is less moral than English art, not because it preaches less, but because it is more given to levity and trifling, because it exaggerates the part one element plays in life, and because it draws less inspiration from fundamental ethical ideas. It may at times be guilty of indifferentism, but against very little English or American art can this charge be made.

The great distinction of art is that it aims to see life steadily and to see it whole. This is its high and unique service; it would enable us to live in the whole and in the spirit of the whole; not in the part called morality, or philosophy, or religion, or beauty, but in the unity resulting from the fusion and transformation of these varied elements. It affords the one point of view whence the world appears harmonious and complete. The moralist, the preacher, seizes upon a certain part of the world, and makes much of that; the philosopher seizes upon another part, the æsthete upon another; only the great artist comprehends and includes all these, and sees life and nature as a vital, consistent whole.

Hence it is that a work of pure art is a complete product in a sense that no other production of a

man's mind is; or, as Ruskin says, "It is the work of the whole spirit of man," and faithfully reflects that spirit. The intellect may write the sermon, or the essay, or the criticism, but the character, the entire life and personality are implicated in a creative work.

Disinterestedness means no more in art, in letters, than it means in life. In our kind deeds, our acts of charity, in love, in virtue, we act from disinterested motives. We have no ulterior purpose. These things are their own reward. A noble life is disinterested; it bestows benefits without thought of self. But it is not indifferent. Indifference is personal, — it is a state in which one personal motive cancels another; whereas disinterestedness is impersonal, — it is the complete effacement of self. It is a high, heroic moral state, while indifference is a lax or negative state. We are disinterested when we rescue a child from drowning or stop a runaway horse, but we are not indifferent. A novelist is disinterested when he has no motives but those inherent in his story, no purpose but to hold the mirror up to nature. He is interested and departs from his high calling when he seeks to enforce a particular moral, or to indoctrinate his reader with a particular set of ideas. And yet if he betrays indifference as to the issues of right and wrong, that is a vice; it is contrary to the self-effacement which art demands. To obtrude your indifference is of the same order of faults as to obtrude your

preferences. The innate necessities of the situation may alone speak.

To suppress or to ignore the world of vice and sin is not to be moral; to portray it is not to be immoral. But to gloat over it, to dwell fondly upon it, to return to it, to exaggerate it, to roll it under the tongue as a sweet morsel, — that is to be immoral; and to treat it as time and nature do or as the great artists do, as affording contrasts and difficulties, and disturbing but not destroying the balance of life, is within the scope of the moral. Art must make us free of the whole; every work must in a measure reflect the whole of life; if it dwell too much on that part called sin and evil, it is false to its ideal; it must keep the balance; it must be true to the integrity of nature. All things are permissible in their time and place. That a thing is real and true is no reason why it should go into the artist's picture; but that it belongs there, that it is organic there, a part of a vital whole, and that that whole is a fair representation of human life — in this is the justification. Not every scene in nature composes well into a picture, and not every phase of human life is equally significant in a creative work. That nature does this or that is no reason why the artist should do it, unless he can show an equal insouciance and an equal prodigality and power. He must take what he can make his own and imbue with the spirit of life. I lately read a novel by one

of our most promising young novelists, in which there was a streak of vulgar realism, forced in, evidently, under the pressure of a theory, — the theory that art is never to shrink from the true. It offended because it was entirely gratuitous; there was no necessity for it. If it was true, it was not apt; if it was real, it was not fit; it jarred; it was dragged in by main force; it was a false note. Is not anything disagreeable in a novel of the imagination a false note? Disagreeable, I mean, not by reason of the subject matter, but by reason of the treatment. Dante makes hell fascinating by his treatment.

There are three ways of treating the under side of nature. There is the childlike simplicity of the Biblical writers, who think no evil; there is the artistic frankness of the great dramatic poets, who know the value of foils and contrasts, and who cannot ignore any element of life; and there is the license and levity of the lascivious poets, who live in the erotic alone. Both Ibsen and Tolstoi have been condemned as immoral only because their artistic scheme embraces all the elements that are potent in life. Of levity, of exaggeration, they are not guilty. If Zola is to be condemned, it is probably because he makes too prominent certain things, and thus destroys the proportion. In nature nothing is detached. Her great currents flow on and purify themselves. The ugly, the unclean, are quickly lost sight of; the sky and the sun cover all, bathe

all. But art is detachment: our attention is fixed upon a few points, and a drop or two too much of certain things spoils it all. In nature a drop or two too much does not matter; we quickly escape, we find compensation. A bad odor in the open air is of little consequence; but in Zola's books the bad odors are as in a closed room, and we soon pray to be delivered from them.

VII

DEMOCRACY AND LITERATURE

THE one new thing in the world in our day is democracy, the coming forward of the people, and that which has grown out of it, or which goes along with it, — science, free inquiry, the industrial system, the humanitarian spirit. The old and past world from which we inherit our literary tastes and standards was characterized by a condition of things quite different, — the supremacy of the few, the leadership of the hero, the strong man, — the picturesque age that gave us art, theology, philosophy, and the great epic poems. It was the youth of the race. Mankind seems now fast nearing its majority. The bewitching, the delusive, the unreasoning, pathetic time of youth is past. What the man loses and what he gains in passing from youth to manhood the race has lost and has gained in passing from the age of myth to the age of science. A charm, an innocence, a susceptibility, a credulity, and many other things are gone; a seriousness, a reasonableness, a breadth of outlook, power to deal with real things, sanity, and self-control, have come. Youth is cruel, age is kind and considerate. All forms,

ceremonies, titles, all conferred dignities and arbitrary distinctions, all pomp and circumstance, count for less and less in the world. Art is less and less; nature is more and more. The extrinsic, the put on, the ornamental, the factitious, count for less and less; theology, metaphysics, the sacredness of priests, the divinity of kings, count for less and less, while the real, the true, the essential, in all fields, count for more. It is doubtful if art for art's sake can ever be in the future what it has been in the past. We are too deeply absorbed in the reality; we care less and less for the symbol and more and more for the thing symbolized. The monarchical idea is dwindling; the throne as a symbol has lost its force; the old religious language of supplication and praise begins to have a hollow, archaic sound. The idea of the fatherhood of God is fast taking the place of the idea of the despotism of God. It has taken mankind all these centuries to rise to the conception of a being with whom the language of excessive flattery and adulation seems out of place. The democratic idea will eventually penetrate and modify our religious notions. We shall no longer seek to propitiate an offended deity by groveling in the dust before an imaginary throne. The despot goes out, the Brother comes in. All these things and many more cluster around the word democracy.

What is the import of the word as applied to literature? How far will it carry in this field? Is the

democratic movement favorable or unfavorable to the growth of true literature? It has been often said that literature is essentially aristocratic; that is, I suppose, that it implies a degree of excellence, a kind of excellence, quite beyond the appreciation of the masses. This is no doubt in a measure true, and always has been true. While the mass of the people are not good offhand judges of the best literature, it is equally true that great literature — literature that has breadth and power, like the English Bible or like Bunyan, and many other books that transcend the sphere of mere letters — makes its way more or less among the people. The highest ideals in any sphere can never draw the many; yet the few, the elect who are drawn by them, are probably just as sure to appear in a democracy as in an oligarchy.

To some readers democracy in literature seems to suggest only an incursion of the loud, the vulgar, the cheap and meretricious. Apparently it suggests only these things to Mr. Edmund Gosse, whose volume "Questions at Issue" contains an essay upon this subject.

Mr. Gosse congratulates the guild of letters that the summits of literature have not yet been submerged by the flood of democracy. The standards have not been lowered in obedience to the popular taste.

But Mr. Gosse thinks the social revolution or

evolution now imminent will require a new species of poetry, that this poetry will be democratic to a degree at present unimaginable, though just what it is to be democratic in poetry is not very clear to him. He says: "The aristocratic tradition is still paramount in all art. Kings, princesses, and the symbols of chivalry are as essential to poetry, as we now conceive it, as roses, stars, or nightingales," and he does not see what will be left if this romantic phraseology is done away with. We shall certainly have left what we had before these types and symbols came into vogue, — nature, life, man, God. If out of these things we cannot supply ourselves with new types and values, then certainly we shall be hard put.

The critic cites the popularity of Tennyson as an illustration of the influence of literature upon democracy rather than of democracy upon literature. It is true that Tennyson was not begotten by the democratic spirit, but by the old feudal spirit; to him the people were but a hundred-headed beast, and his temper toward this beast, if reports are true, was anything but democratic. Tennyson was of the haughty, exclusive, lordly Norman spirit, and his popularity simply showed how widespread the appreciation of literary excellence may become in democratic times.

Of course universal suffrage is of slight import in literature: not by the vote of the many, but by

the judgment of the few, are the true standards upheld. The novels that sell by the hundred thousand will not be the best, or even the second or third best, and their great vogue only indicates that the diffusion of education has enormously enlarged the reading public, and that in democratic times, as in all other times, there never has been and probably never will be enough good taste to go around.

Democracy, as it affects, or should affect, literature, no more means a lowering of the standard of excellence than it means a lowering of the standards in science, or in art, or in farming or engineering or ship-building, or in the art of living itself. It means a lifting up of the average, with the great prizes, the high ideals, as attractive and as difficult as ever. Because the people are crude and run for the moment after the cheap and meretricious, we are not therefore to infer that the cheap and meretricious will permanently content them. Democracy in literature, as exemplified by the two great modern democrats in letters, Whitman and Tolstoi, means a new and more deeply religious way of looking at mankind, as well as at all the facts and objects of the visible world. It means, furthermore, the finding of new artistic motives and values in the people, in science and the modern spirit, in liberty, fraternity, equality, in the materialism and industrialism of man's life as we know it in our day and land, — the carrying into imaginative fields the quality of com-

mon humanity, that which it shares with real things and with all open-air nature, with hunters, farmers, sailors, and real workers in all fields.

The typical democratic poet will hold and wield his literary and artistic endowment as a common, everyday man, the brother and equal of all, and never for a moment as the man of exceptional parts and advantages, exclusive and aloof. His poems will imply a great body of humanity — the masses, the toilers — and will carry into emotional and ideal fields the atmosphere of these.

Behold the artistic motives furnished by feudalism, by royalty, by lords and ladies, by the fears and superstitions of the past, by mythology and ecclesiasticism, by religious and political terrorism in all their manifold forms. Art and literature have lived upon these things for ages. Can democracy, can the worth and picturesqueness of the people, furnish no worthy themes and motives for the poets? Can science, can the present day, can the religion of humanity, the conquest of nature's forces, inspire no poetic enthusiasm and give rise to great art rivaling that of the past? As between the past and the present, undoubtedly the difficulty is not in the poverty of the material of to-day, but in the inadequacy of the man. It requires a great spirit, a powerful personality, to master and absorb the diverse and complex elements of our time and imbue them with poetic enthusiasm.

The humanitarian enthusiasm as a *motif* in literature and art — the inspiration begotten by the contemplation of the wrongs, the sufferings, and the hopes of the people — undoubtedly came in with democracy. It was quite unknown to the ancient and to the feudal world. To all the more vital voices of our time this enthusiasm gives the tone. How pronounced it is in two of our latest and most promising poets, Mr. Edwin Markham and Mr. William Vaughn Moody!

It is hard to shake off the conviction that the old order of things had the advantage of picturesqueness. Is it because it is so hard to free ourselves from the illusions of time and distance? Charm, enticement, dwell with the remote, the unfamiliar. The now, the here, are vulgar and commonplace. We find it hard to realize that the great deeds were done on just such a day as this, and that the actors in them were just such men as we see about us. Then the days of one's youth seem strange and incredible; how different their light from this hard, prosy glare! Our distrust of our own day and land as furnishing suitable material for poetry and romance doubtless springs largely from this illusion.

At the same time, a mechanical and industrial age like ours no doubt offers a harder problem to the imaginative producer than the ages of faith and fanaticism of the past. The steam whistle, the type of our civilization, what can the poet make of it? The

clank of machinery, it must be confessed, is less inspiring than the clash of arms; the railroad is less pleasing to look upon than the highway, because it is more arbitrary and mechanical. In the same way, the steamship seems unrelated to the great forces and currents of the globe. Yet to put these things in poetry only requires time, only requires a more complete adjustment of our lives to them, and hence the proper vista and association. As is always the case, it is a question of the man and not of the material. Goethe said to Eckermann, "Our German æsthetical people are always talking about poetical and unpoetical objects, and in one respect they are not quite wrong; yet at bottom no real object is unpoetical, if the poet knows how to use it properly," — if he can throw enough feeling into it. I lately read a poem by one of our younger poets on an entirely modern theme, the building of the railroad, — the gang of men cutting through hills, tunneling mountains, filling valleys, bridging chasms, etc. But, though vividly described, it did not quite reach the poetical; it lacked the personal and the human; it was realistic without the freeing touch of the idealistic. Some story, some interest, some enthusiasm overarching it, would have supplied an atmosphere that was lacking. We cannot be permanently interested in the gigantic or in sheer brute power unless they are in some way related to life and its aspirations. The battle of man with man is

more interesting than the battle of man with rocks and chasms, because men can strike back, and victory is not to be had on such easy terms.

The same objection cannot be urged against Mr. William Vaughn Moody's poem on the steam engine, which he treats under the figure of "The Brute," — a poem of great imaginative power in which the human interest is constantly paramount. The still small voice of humanity is always heard through the Brute's roar, as may be seen in the first stanza:

"Through his might men work their wills;
They have boweled out the hills
For food to keep him toiling in the cages they have wrought;
And they fling him hour by hour
Limbs of men to give him power,
Brains of men to give him cunning; and for dainties to devour
Children's souls, the little worth; hearts of women, cheaply bought.
He takes them and he breaks them, but he gives them scanty thought."

Quite different is the treatment of "The Lightning Express" by a Western poet, Mr. J. P. Irvine, yet the poetic note is clearly and surely struck in his stanzas too: —

"In storm and darkness, night and day,
Through mountain gorge or level way,

With lightening rein and might unspent,
And head erect in scorn of space,
Holds, neck-and-neck, with time a race,
Flame-girt across a continent.

Think not of danger; every wheel
Of all that clank and roll below
Rings singing answers, steel for steel,
Beneath the hammer's testing blow;
And what though fields go swirling round,
And backward swims the mazy ground,
So swift the herds seem standing still,
As scared they dash from hill to hill;
And though the brakes may grind to fire
The gravel as they grip the tire
And holding, strike a startling vein
Of tremor through the surging train,
The hand of him who guides the rein
Is all-controlling and intent;
Fear not, although the race you ride
Is on the whirlwind, side by side,
With time across a continent."

What are the sources of the interesting in life? Novelty is one, but it is short-lived; beauty and sublimity are others, and are more lasting. But the main source of the interesting is human association. The landscape that is written over with human history, how it holds us and draws us! All phases of modern industrial life — the miner, the lumberman, the road-builder, the engineer, the factory-hand, are

available for poetic treatment to him who can bring the proper fund of human association, who can make the human element in these things paramount over the mechanical element. The more of nature you get in, the more the picture has a background of earth and sky, or of great human passions and heroisms, the more the imagination is warmed and moved. The railroad is itself a blotch upon the earth, but it has a mighty background. In itself it is at war with every feature of the landscape it passes through; it stains the snows, it befouls the water, it poisons the air, it smuts the grass and the foliage, it expels the peace and the quiet, it puts to rout every rural divinity. It adapts itself to nothing; it is as arbitrary as a cyclone and as killing as a pestilence. Yet a train of cars thundering through storm and darkness, racing with winds and clouds, is a sublime object to contemplate; it is sublime because of its triumph over time and space, and because of the danger and dread that compass it about. It has a tremendous human background. The body-killing and soul-blighting occupations peculiar to our civilization are not of themselves suggestive of poetic thoughts; but if Dante made poetry out of hell, would not a nature copious and powerful enough make poetry out of the vast and varied elements of our materialistic civilization?

VIII

POETRY AND ELOQUENCE

WHERE does eloquence end, where does poetry begin?" inquires Renan in his "Future of Science." And he goes on to say, "The whole difference lies in a peculiar harmony, in a more or less sonorous ring, with regard to which an experienced faculty never hesitates."

Is not the "sonorous ring," however, more characteristic of eloquence than of poetry? Poetry does begin where eloquence ends; it is a higher and finer harmony. Nearly all men feel the power of eloquence, but poetry does not sway the multitude; it does not sway at all, — it lifts, and illuminates, and soothes. It reaches the spirit, while eloquence stops with the reason and the emotions.

Eloquence is much the more palpable, real, available; it is a wind that fills every sail and makes every mast bend, while poetry is a breeze touched with a wild perfume from field or wood. Poetry is consistent with perfect tranquillity of spirit; a true poem may have the calm of a summer day, the placidity of a mountain lake, but eloquence is a torrent, a tempest, mass in motion, an army with banners,

the burst of a hundred instruments of music. Tennyson's "Maud" is a notable blending of the two.

There is something martial in eloquence, the roll of the drum, the cry of the fife, the wheel and flash of serried ranks. Its end is action; it shapes events, it takes captive the reason and the understanding. Its basis is earnestness, vehemence, depth of conviction.

There is no eloquence without heat, and no poetry without light. An earnest man is more or less an eloquent man. Eloquence belongs to the world of actual affairs and events; it is aroused by great wrongs and great dangers, it flourishes in the forum and the senate. Poetry is more private and personal, is more for the soul and the religious instincts; it courts solitude and wooes the ideal.

Anything swiftly told or described, the sense of speed and volume, is, or approaches, eloquence; while anything heightened and deepened, any meaning and beauty suddenly revealed, is, or approaches, poetry. Hume says of the eloquence of Demosthenes, "It is rapid harmony, exactly adjusted to the sense. It is vehement reasoning without any appearance of art; it is disdain, anger, boldness, freedom, involved in a continual stream of argument."

The passions of eloquence and poetry differ in this respect; one is reason inflamed, the other is imagination kindled.

Any object of magnitude in swift motion, a horse

at the top of his speed, a regiment of soldiers on the double quick, a train of cars under full way, moves us in a way that the same object at rest does not. The great secret of eloquence is to set mass in motion, to marshal together facts and considerations, imbue them with passion, and hurl them like an army on the charge, upon the mind of the reader or hearer.

The pleasure we derive from eloquence is more acute, more physiological, I might say, more of the blood and animal spirits, than our pleasure from poetry. I imagine it was almost a dissipation to have heard a man like Father Taylor. One's feelings and emotions were all out of their banks like the creeks in spring. But this was largely the result of his personal magnetism and vehemence of utterance.

The contrast between eloquent prose and poetic prose would be more to the point. The pleasure from each is precious and genuine, but our pleasure from the latter is no doubt more elevated and enduring.

Gibbon's prose is often eloquent, never poetical. Ruskin's prose is at times both, though his temperament is not that of the orator. There is more caprice than reason in him. The prose of De Quincey sometimes has the "sonorous ring" of which Renan speaks. The following passage from his essay on "The Philosophy of Roman History" is a good sample: —

"The battle of Actium was followed by the final conquest of Egypt. That conquest rounded and integrated the glorious empire; it was now circular as a shield, orbicular as the disk of a planet; the great Julian arch was now locked into the cohesion of granite by its last keystone. From that day forward, for three hundred years, there was silence in the world; no muttering was heard; no eye winked beneath the wing. Winds of hostility might still rave at intervals, but it was on the outside of the mighty empire, it was at a dreamlike distance; and, like the storms that beat against some monumental castle, 'and at the doors and windows seem to call,' they rather irritated and vivified the sense of security, than at all disturbed its luxurious lull."

Contrast with this a passage from Emerson's first prose work, "Nature," wherein the poetic element is more conspicuous: —

"The poet, the orator, bred in the woods, whose senses have been nourished by their fair and appeasing changes, year after year, without design and without heed, shall not lose their lesson altogether, in the roar of cities or the broil of politics. Long hereafter, amidst agitation and terror in national councils, — in the hour of revolution, — these solemn images shall reappear in their morning lustre, as fit symbols and words of the thoughts which the passing events shall awaken. At the call of a noble sentiment, again the woods wave, the pines murmur,

the river rolls and shines, and the cattle low upon the mountains, as he saw and heard them in his infancy. And with these forms, the spells of persuasion, the keys of power are put into his hands."

Or this passage from Carlyle's "French Revolution," shall we call it eloquent prose or poetic prose?

"In this manner, however, has the Day bent downwards. Wearied mortals are creeping home from their field labors; the village artisan eats with relish his supper of herbs, or has strolled forth to the village street for a sweet mouthful of air and human news. Still summer eventide everywhere! The great sun hangs flaming on the uttermost northwest; for it is his longest day this year. The hilltops, rejoicing, will ere long be at their ruddiest, and blush goodnight. The thrush in green dells, on long-shadowed leafy spray, pours gushing his glad serenade, to the babble of brooks grown audible; silence is stealing over the Earth."

What noble eloquence in Tacitus! Indeed, eloquence was natural to the martial and world-subduing Roman; but his poetry is for the most part of a secondary order. It is often said of French poetry that it is more eloquent than poetic. Of English poetry the reverse is probably true, though of such a poet as Byron it seems to me that eloquence is the chief characteristic.

Byron never, to my notion, touches the deeper and finer poetic chords. He is witty, he is brilliant,

he is eloquent, but is he ever truly poetical? He stirs the blood, he kindles the fancy, but does he ever diffuse through the soul the joy and the light of pure poetry? Goethe expressed almost unbounded admiration for Byron, yet admitted that he was too worldly-minded, and that a great deal of his poetry should have been fired off in Parliament in the shape of parliamentary speeches. Wordsworth, on the other hand, when he was not prosy and heavy, was poetical; he was never eloquent.

A fine sample of eloquence in poetry is Browning's "How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix." Of its kind there is nothing in the language to compare with it. One needs to read such a piece occasionally as a moral sanitary measure; it aerates his emotions as a cataract does a creek. Scott's highest excellence as a poet is his eloquence. The same is true of Macaulay and of Campbell, though the latter's "To the Rainbow" breathes the spirit of true poetry.

Among our own poets Halleck's "Marco Bozzaris" thrills us with its fiery eloquence. Dr. Holmes's "Old Ironsides" also is just what such a poem should be, just what the occasion called for, a rare piece of rhymed eloquence.

Eloquence is so good, so refreshing, it is such a noble and elevating excitement, that one would fain have more of it, even in poetry. It is too rare and precious a product to be valued lightly.

Here is a brief example of Byron's eloquence: —

"There, where death's brief pang was quickest,
And the battle's wreck lay thickest,
Strewed beneath the advancing banner
Of the eagles' burning crest, —
There with thunder-clouds to fan her
Victory beaming from her breast!
While the broken line enlarging
Fell, or fled along the plain; —
There be sure *Murat* was charging!
There he ne'er shall charge again!"

This from Tennyson is of another order: —

"Thy voice is heard through rolling drums
That beat to battle where he stands;
Thy face across his fancy comes,
And gives the battle to his hands:
A moment, while the trumpets blow,
He sees his brood about thy knee;
The next, like fire, he meets the foe,
And strikes him dead for thine and thee."

The chief value of all patriotic songs and poems, like Mrs. Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," or Mr. Stedman's John Brown poem, or Randall's "Maryland," or Burns's "Bannockburn," or Whitman's "Beat! Beat! Drums," is their impassioned eloquence. Patriotism, war, wrong, slavery, these are the inspirers of eloquence.

Of course no sharp line can be drawn between

eloquence and poetry; they run together, they blend in all first-class poems; yet there is a wide difference between the two, and it is probably in the direction I have indicated. Power and mastery in either field are the most precious of human gifts.

IX

GILBERT WHITE AGAIN

ONE of the few books which I can return to and re-read every six or seven years is Gilbert White's "Selborne." It has a perennial charm. It is much like country things themselves. One does not read it with excitement or eager avidity; it is in a low key; it touches only upon minor matters; it is not eloquent, or witty, or profound; it has only now and then a twinkle of humor or a glint of fancy, and yet it has lived an hundred years and promises to live many hundreds of years more. So many learned and elaborate treatises have sunk beneath the waves upon which this cockle-shell of a book rides so safely and buoyantly! What is the secret of its longevity? One can do little more than name its qualities without tracing them to their sources. It is simple and wholesome, like bread, or meat, or milk. Perhaps it is just this same unstrained quality that keeps the book alive. Books that are piquant and exciting like condiments, or cloying like confectionery or pastry, it seems, have much less chance of survival. The secret of longevity of a man — what is it? Sanity, moderation, regularity, and that plus

vitality, which is a gift. The book that lives has these things, and it has that same plus vitality, the secret of which cannot be explored. The sensational, intemperate books set the world on fire for a day, and then end in ashes and forgetfulness.

White's book diffuses a sort of rural England atmosphere through the mind. It is not the work of a city man who went down into the country to write it up, but of a born countryman, — one who had in the very texture of his mind the flavor of rural things. Then it is the growth of a particular locality. Let a man stick his staff into the ground anywhere and say, "This is home," and describe things from that point of view, or as they stand related to that spot, — the weather, the fauna, the flora, — and his account shall have an interest to us it could not have if not thus located and defined. This is one secret of White's charm. His work has a home air, a certain privacy and particularity. The great world is afar off ; Selborne is as snug and secluded as a chimney corner; we get an authentic glimpse into the real life of one man there; we see him going about intent, lovingly intent, upon every phase of nature about him. We get glimpses into humble cottages and into the ways and doings of the people; we see the bacon drying in the chimneys; we see the poor gathering in Wolmer Forest the sticks and twigs dropped by the rooks in building their nests; we see them claiming the "lop and top" when the

big trees are cut. Indeed, the human touches, the human figures here and there in White's pages, add much to the interest. The glimpses we get of his own goings and comings — we wish there were more of them. We should like to know what took him to London during that great snowstorm of January, 1776, and how he got there, inasmuch as the roads were so blocked by the snow that the carriages from Bath with their fine ladies on their way to attend the Queen's birthday, were unable to get through. "The ladies fretted, and offered large rewards to labourers if they would shovel them a track to London, but the relentless heaps of snow were too bulky to be removed." The parson found the city bedded deep in snow, and so noiseless by reason of it that "it seemed to convey an uncomfortable idea of desolation."

When one reads the writers of our own day upon rural England and the wild life there, he finds that they have not the charm of the Selborne naturalist; mainly, I think, because they go out with deliberate intent to write up nature. They choose their theme; the theme does not choose them. They love the birds and flowers for the literary effects they can produce out of them. It requires no great talent to go out in the fields or woods and describe in graceful sentences what one sees there, — birds, trees, flowers, clouds, streams; but to give the atmosphere of these things, to seize the significant and interest-

ing features and to put the reader into sympathetic communication with them, that is another matter.

Hence back of all, the one thing that has told most in keeping White's book alive is undoubtedly its sound style — sentences actually filled with the living breath of a man. We are everywhere face to face with something genuine and real; objects, ideas, stand out on the page; the articulation is easy and distinct. White had no literary ambitions. His style is that of a scholar, but of a scholar devoted to natural knowledge. There was evidently something winsome and charming about the man personally, and these qualities reappear in his pages.

He was probably a parson who made as many calls afield as in the village, if not more. An old nurse in his family said of him, fifty years after his death, "He was a still, quiet body, and that there was not a bit of harm in him."

White was a type of the true observer, the man with the detective eye. He did not seek to read his own thoughts and theories into Nature, but submitted his mind to her with absolute frankness and ingenuousness. He had infinite curiosity, and delighted in nothing so much as a new fact about the birds and the wild life around him. To see the thing as it was in itself and in its relations, that was his ambition. He could resist the tendency of his own mind to believe without sufficient evidence. Apparently he wanted to fall in with the notion cur-

rent during the last century, that swallows hibernated in the mud in the bottoms of streams and ponds, but he could not gather convincing proof. It was not enough that a few belated specimens were seen in the fall lingering about such localities, or again hovering over them early in spring; or that some old grandfather had seen a man who had taken live swallows out of the mud. Produce the man and let us cross-question him, — that was White's attitude. Dr. Johnson said confidently that swallows did thus pass the winter in the mud "conglobulated into a ball," but Johnson had that literary cast of mind that prefers a picturesque statement to the exact fact. White was led astray by no literary ambition. His interest in the life of nature was truly a scientific one; he must know the fact first, and then give it to the humanities. How true it is in science, in literature, in life, that any secondary motive vitiates the result! Seek ye the kingdom of truth first, and all things shall be added.

But White seems finally to have persuaded himself that at least a few swallows passed the winter in England in a torpid state — if not in the bottom of streams or ponds, then in holes in their banks. He reasoned from analogy, though he had expressed his distrust of that mode of reasoning. If bats, insects, toads, turtles, and other creatures can thus pass the winter, why not swallows? On many different occasions, during mild days late in the fall

and early in the spring, he saw house-martins flying about; the weather suddenly changing to colder, they quickly disappeared. Bats and turtles came forth, then vanished in the same way. White finally concluded that the mystery was the same in both cases, — that the creatures were brought from their winter retreats by the warmth, only to retire to them again when it changed to cold. If he had adhered to his usual caution he would have waited for actual proof of this fact, — the finding of a torpid swallow. He made frequent search for such, but never found any.

This notion so long current about the swallows probably had its origin in two things: first, their partiality for mud as nesting material; and secondly, the habit of these birds, after they have begun to collect into flocks in midsummer, preparatory to their migrations, of passing the night in vast numbers along the margins of streams and ponds. White knew of their habits in this respect, and wanted to see in the fact presumptive evidence of the truth of the notion that, though they may not retire into the water itself, yet that they "may conceal themselves in the banks of pools and rivers during the uncomfortable months of the year." One midsummer twilight in northern Vermont I came upon hundreds of swallows — barn and cliff — settled for the night upon some low alders that grew upon the margin of a deep, still pool in the river. The bushes bent

down with them as with an over-load of fruit. This attraction for the water on the part of the swallow family is certainly a curious one, and is not easily explained.

Our sharp-eyed parson had observed that the nesting habits of birds afford a clue to their roosting habits, — that they usually pass the night in or near those places where they build their nests. Thus, the tree-builders roost in trees; the ground-builders upon the ground. I have seen our chickadee and woodpecker enter, late in the day, the cavities in decaying limbs of trees. I have seen the oriole dispose of herself for the night on the end of a maple branch where her "pendent bed and procreant cradle" was begun a few days later. In walking through the summer fields in the twilight, the vesper sparrow or the song sparrow will often start up from almost beneath one's feet. It is said that the snow-bunting will plunge beneath the snow and pass the night there. The ruffed grouse often does this, but the swallows seem to be an exception to this rule. I have seen a vast cloud of swifts take up their lodging for the night in a tall, unused chimney; but the barn swallows and the cliff and the white-bellied swallows, at least after the young have flown, appear to pass the night in the vicinity of streams. White noticed also — and here the true observer again crops out — that the fieldfare, a kind of thrush, though a tree-builder, always appears to pass the

night on the ground. "The larkers, in dragging their nets by night, frequently catch them in the wheat stubbles." He learned, as every observer sooner or later learns, to be careful of sweeping statements, — that the truth of nature is not always caught by the biggest generalizations. After speaking of the birds that dust themselves, earth their plumage — *pulveratrices*, as he calls them — he says, "As far as I can observe, many birds that dust themselves never wash, and I once thought that those birds that wash themselves would never dust; but here I find myself mistaken," and he instances the house sparrow as doing both. White seems to have been about the first writer upon natural history who observed things minutely; he saw through all those sort of sleight-o'-hand movements and ways of the birds and beasts. He held his eye firmly to the point. He saw the swallows feed their young on the wing; he saw the fern-owl, while hawking about a large oak, "put out its short leg while on the wing, and by a bend of the head deliver something into its mouth." This explained to him the use of its middle toe, "which is curiously furnished with a serrated claw." He timed the white owls feeding their young under the eaves of his church, with watch in hand. He saw them transfer the mouse they brought, from the foot to the beak, that they might have the free use of the former in ascending to the nest.

In his walks and drives about the country he was

all attention to the life about him, simply from his delight in any fresh bit of natural knowledge. His curiosity never flagged. He had naturally an alert mind. His style reflects this alertness and sensitiveness. In his earlier days he was an enthusiastic sportsman, and he carried the sportsman's trained sense and love of the chase into his natural history studies. He complained that faunists were too apt to content themselves with general terms and bare descriptions; the reason, he says, is plain, — "because all that may be done at home in a man's study; but the investigation of the life and conversation of animals is a concern of much more trouble and difficulty, and is not to be attained but by the active and inquisitive, and by those that reside much in the country." He himself had the true inquisitiveness and activity, and the loving, discriminating eye. He saw the specific marks and differences at a glance. Then, his love of these things was so well known in the neighborhood, that this kind of knowledge flowed to him from all sides. He was a magnet that attracted all the fresh natural lore about him. People brought him birds and eggs and nests, and animals or any natural curiosity, and reported to him any unusual occurrence. They loaned him the use of their eyes and ears. One day a countryman told him he had found a young fern-owl in the nest of a small bird on the ground, and that it was fed by the little bird. "I went to see this extraordinary

phenomenon, and found that it was a young cuckoo hatched in the nest of a titlark; it was become vastly too big for its nest, appearing to have its large wings extended beyond the nest,

> 'in tenui re
> Majores pennas nido extendisse,'

and was very fierce and pugnacious, pursuing my finger, as I teased it, for many feet from the nest, and sparring, and buffeting with its wings like a gamecock. The dupe of a dam appeared at a distance, hovering about with meat in its mouth, and expressing the greatest solicitude."

He observed that the train of the peacock was really not its tail, but an entirely separate appendage. He remarked how extremely fond cats are of fish, and yet of all quadrupeds "are the least disposed towards the water." This is a curious fact to him. A neighbor of his, in ploughing late in the fall, turned a water-rat out of his hibernaculum in a field far removed from any water. The rat had laid up more than a gallon of potatoes for its winter food. This was another curious fact that set the writer speculating. His correspondent tells him of a heronry near some manor-house that excites his curiosity much. "Fourscore nests of such a bird on one tree is a rarity which I would ride half as many miles to get a sight of." Such a lively curiosity had the parson. His thirst for exact knowledge was so great

that on one occasion he took measurements of the carcass of a moose when he was probably compelled to hold his nose to finish the task. At one place he heard of a woman who professed to cure cancers by the use of toads; some of his brother clergymen believed the story, but when he came to sift the evidence he made up his mind that the woman was a fraud.

He said truly, "There is such a propensity in mankind towards deceiving and being deceived, that one cannot safely relate anything from common report, especially in print, without expressing some degree of doubt and suspicion."

The observations of hardly one man in five hundred are of any value for scientific purposes.

White had the true scientific caution, and was, as a rule, very careful to verify his statements.

Of course the science of White's time was far behind our own. The phenomenon of the weather, for instance, was not understood then as it is now. The great atmospheric waves that sweep across the continents, and the regular alternations of heat and cold, were unsuspected. White observed that cold descended from above, but he thought that thaws often originated underground, "from warm vapours which arise." He was greatly puzzled, too, when, during the severe cold of December, 1784, the thermometer fell many degrees lower in the valley bottoms than on the hills. He had not observed that the very cold

air on such occasions settles down into the valleys and fills them like water, marking the height to which it rises by a level line upon the trees or foliage. It is a wonder that his sharp eye did not detect the true source of honey dew, but it did not. He thought it proceeded from the effluvia of flowers, which, being drawn up into the sky by the warmth of the sun by day, descended again as dew by night.

When a French anatomist announced that he had discovered why the cuckoo did not hatch its own eggs, — namely, because the crop or craw of the bird was placed back of the sternum, so as to make a protuberance on the belly, — White dissected a cuckoo for himself, and, finding the fact as stated, proceeded to dissect other birds that he knew did incubate, as the fern-owl and a hawk, and finding the craw situated the same as in the cuckoo, justly charged the Frenchman with having reached an unscientific conclusion.

In his seventy-seventh letter White clearly anticipates Darwin as to the beneficial functions of earthworms in the soil, and tells farmers and gardeners that the little creatures which they look upon as their enemies are really their best friends.

White has had imitators, but no successful rivals. A work much in the spirit and manner of his famous book, called "Jesse's Gleanings in Natural History," was published fifty years later. It had some reputation in its own day, but seems to be quite forgotten

in our time. A good reader quickly sees that its pages have not the same fresh, distinctive quality as White's, not the same atmosphere of unconscious curiosity and alert interest. They are stamped with a die far less clear and individual. The field covered is the same, the facts and incidents are the same, but the medium through which we see them all is not the same.

The following extract gives a fair sample of the style: —

"The enjoyments and delights of a country life have been sung by poets in all ages, and it is our own fault if we find the country irksome, or less agreeable than a crowded metropolis. It affords many resources of a most agreeable nature, to those who seek for rational and tranquil enjoyments. A beautiful prospect, a walk by the side of a river in fine weather, in the agreeable shade of a wood or cool valley, have great charms for those who are fond of the country. We may then exclaim with Virgil, —

> 'O, qui me gelidis convallibus Haemi
> Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbra!'"

But even the Virgilian quotation does not give it the flavor of White's pages.

X

LUCID LITERATURE

NOTHING can make up in a writer for the want of lucidity. It is one of the cardinal literary virtues. If the page is not clear, if we see through it as through a glass darkly, if there is the least blur or opacity, the work to that extent is condemned. It is a false notion that some thoughts or ideas are necessarily obscure, or complex, or involved. Ideas are what we make them. If we think obscurely, our ideas are obscure; if one's mental activity is complex, his ideas are complex. Always is the mind of the writer the medium through which we see his matter. Such a poet as George Meredith thinks obscurely. There is a large blind spot in his mind, so that at times an almost total eclipse passes over his page. Strain one's vision as one may, one cannot make out just what he is trying to say. Then there are lucid intervals — strong, telling lines; then the shadow falls again and the reader is groping in the dark. The difficulty is never innate in his subject, but is in the poet's use of language, as if at times he caught at words blindly and used them without reference to their accepted meanings, as when he says

of the skylark, "He *drinks* his hurried flight and drops." How can one adjust his mind to the notion of a bird drinking its own flight?

Or take this puzzle: —

> "Vermilion wings, by distance held
> To pause aflight while fleeting swift,
> And high aloft the pearl inshelled
> Her lucid glow in glow will lift."

Does not the reading of such lines set one's head in a whirl?

The impression of novelty can never be made by a trick in the use of language, nor can the sense of mystery be given by obscurity of expression. Veils and screens and dim lights may do it in the world of sense, but not in the world of ideas. The reader feels all the time that there is something in the way, and that he would see clearly if the writer thought clearly. Freshness and novelty are the gifts of the writer whose mind is fresh and who has lively and novel emotions in the presence of every-day things and events.

There is a sense of mystery in much of the poetry of Wordsworth and Tennyson, and in our own Emerson and Whitman, but little or none of the Meredithian blur and opacity. One may not at once catch the full meaning of Wordsworth's "Ode to Immortality," or Tennyson's "Tiresias" or "Ancient Sage," or Emerson's "Brahma," or Whitman's

"Sleep Chasings," but how transparent the language, how unequivocal the emotion, how direct and solid the expression! There is a vast difference between the impression or want of impression made by a commonplace thought veiled and hidden by ambiguity of phrase, and that made by "something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns." Great poets give us a sense of depth and height, of the far and the rare. Meredith does at times, but oftener he gives us only a sense of the dense and the foggy.

There are two reasons why we may not understand a man. In one case the fault is in him, — in his clouded and ambiguous way of thinking, such as I have already spoken of. In the other case the fault, or rather the difficulty, is in us. The man may live and move upon a different spiritual plane, he may have an atmosphere and cherish ideals that belong to another world than ours. Thus the solid men of Boston did not understand Emerson, but said their daughters did. The daughters were habitually more familiar with Emerson's ideal values than the fathers were. Thus Scott said he did not understand Wordsworth, could not follow his "abstruse ideas;" Campbell suited him better. Scott belonged to another type of mind than that of Wordsworth's, lived in another world. There was no sense of mystery in his mind, — of that haunting, elusive something which Wordsworth felt in all

outward nature. There was no religion in Scott's love of nature, and it is this probably that baffled him in Wordsworth. Both were born countrymen and equal lovers of common, rural things, but Wordsworth associated them with his spiritual and ideal joys and experiences, while Scott found in them an appeal to his copious animal spirits, and his love of sensuous beauty. Wordsworth would understand Scott much better than Scott would understand Wordsworth. The ancient poets probably would not understand the moderns nearly as well as the moderns understand the ancients. We are further along on the road of human experience.

Then, we may understand a work and not appreciate it, not respond to its appeal. Appreciation is based upon kinship. We are more in sympathy with some types of mind than with others of equal parts. The most impersonal and judicious of critics cannot escape the law of elective affinities. Some books *find* us more than others of similar merit. See how people differ, and are bound to differ, about Whitman, and it is because his aim is not merely to give the reader poetic truth disassociated from all personal qualities and traits, but to give him himself. We cannot separate the poet from the man, and if we do not respond to the man, to his type, to his quality, to his wholesale and radical democracy, we shall not respond to the poet. If we all read authors only through our taste in *belles lettres*,

through our love of literary truth, we should agree in our estimate of them according as our tastes agreed. But the feeling we bring to them is very complex. Character, predisposition, natural affinities, race traits, all play a part. We are very apt to agree about such a poet as Milton, because the personal element plays so small a part in his poetry. If we do not get poetic truth in him we do not get anything. His style is the main thing, as it is with the Greek poets. In other words, there is nothing in Milton that makes a personal appeal. One cannot conceive of any reader taking him to his heart, appropriating him, and finding his life colored and changed by him, as by some later poets. Wordsworth was a revelation to Mill; Goethe, Carlyle, Emerson, Whitman have in the same way been revelations to many readers, and for the same reason, — their intense individual point of view. Their appeal is a personal and a religious one as well as a poetic. No one who has not something of the modern pantheistic feeling toward nature will be deeply touched by Wordsworth. No one who has not felt the burden of modern problems, the decay of the old faiths, will be moved by Arnold's poetry. His "sad lucidity of soul" belongs to our age. No one who has not broken away from the old traditions in art and religion and in politics, and possessed himself emotionally of the point of view afforded by modern science, will make much of

Whitman. Without a certain mental and spiritual experience and a certain stamp of mind Emerson will not be much to you. In Poe one's sense of artistic forms and verbal melody are alone appealed to. He is more to a Frenchman than to an American. If you are ahungered for the bread of life do not go to Poe, do not go to Landor or to Milton, do not go to the current French poets. Go sooner to Goethe, to Tennyson, to Browning, to Arnold, to Whitman, — the great personal poets, the men who have spiritual and religious values as well as poetic. All the great imaginative writers of our century have felt, more or less, the stir and fever of the century, and have been its priests and prophets. The lesser poets have not felt these things. Had Poe been greater or broader he would have felt them, so would Longfellow. Neither went deep enough to touch the formative currents of our social or religious or national life. In the past the great artist has always been at ease in Zion; in our day only the lesser artists are at ease, unless we except Whitman, man of unshaken faith, who is absolutely optimistic, and whose joy and serenity come from the breadth of his vision and the depth and universality of his sympathies.

XI

"MERE LITERATURE"

IS there any justification for the phrase "mere literature" which one often hears nowadays? There is no doubt a serious sneer in it, as Professor Woodrow Wilson, in a recent "Atlantic" essay, avers; but I think the sneer is not aimed so much at literature in itself, as at certain phases of literature. Lowell has been quoted as saying that "mere scholarship is as useless as the collecting of old postage stamps;" yet at vital scholarship — scholarship that is wielded as a weapon, and that results in power — Lowell would be the last man to sneer. In all times of high literary culture and criticism, a great deal is produced that may well be called mere literature, — the result of assiduous training and stimulation of the literary faculties, — just as a great deal of art is produced that may be called mere art. Literature that is the result of the friction upon the mind of other literatures, might, with some justice, be called mere literature. That which is the result of the contact of the mind with reality is, or ought to be, of another order.

Or we may say "mere literature" as we say

"mere gentleman." Now gentlemanly qualities — refinement, good breeding, etc. — are not to be sneered at, unless they stand alone, with no man behind them; and literary qualities — style, learning, fancy, etc. — are not to be sneered at unless *they* stand alone, which is not infrequently the case. We should not apply the phrase "mere gentleman" to Washington, or Lincoln, or Wellington, though these men may have been the most thorough of gentlemen; neither should we apply the phrase "mere literature" to the works of Bacon, or Shakespeare, or Carlyle, or Dante, or Plato. The Bible is literature, but it is not mere literature. We apply the latter term to writings that have little to recommend them save their technical and artistic excellence, like the mass of current poetry and fiction. The men who have nothing to say and say it extremely well produce mere literature.

Both England and France have at the present time many excellent writers, men who possess every grace of style and charm of expression, who still give us only a momentary pleasure. They do not move us, they do not lay strong hands upon us, their works do not take hold of any great reality; they produce mere literature. Literary seriousness, literary earnestness, cannot atone for a want of manly seriousness and moral earnestness. A sensitive artistic conscience cannot make us content with a dull or obtuse moral conscience. The literary worker is

to confront reality in just as serious a mood as does the man of science, if he hopes to produce anything that rises above mere literature. The picnickers, the excursionists, the flower-gatherers of literature do not produce lasting works. The seriousness of Hawthorne was much more than a literary seriousness; the emotion of Whittier at his best is fundamental and human.

There is a passage in Amiel's "Journal" that well expresses the distinction I am aiming at. "I have been thinking a great deal of Victor Cherbuliez," he says, under date of December 4, 1876. "Perhaps his novels make up the most disputable part of his work, — they are so much wanting in simplicity, feeling, reality. And yet what knowledge, style, wit, and subtlety, — how much thought everywhere, and what mastery of language! He astonishes one; I cannot but admire him. Cherbuliez's mind is of immense range, clear-sighted, keen, full of resources; he is an Alexandrian exquisite, substituting for the feeling which makes men earnest the irony which leaves them free. Pascal would say of him, 'He has never risen from the order of thought to the order of charity.' But we must not be ungrateful. A Lucian is not worth an Augustine, but still he is a Lucian. . . . The positive element in Victor Cherbuliez's work is beauty, not goodness, nor moral or religious life."

The positive element in the enduring works is

always something more than the beautiful; it is the true, the vital, the real, as well. The beautiful is there, but the not-beautiful is there also. The world is held together, life is nourished and made strong, and power begotten, by the neutral or negatively beautiful. Works are everywhere produced that are artistically serious, but morally trifling and insincere; faultless in form, but tame and barren in spirit. We could not say this of the works of Froude or Ruskin, of Huxley or Tyndall; we cannot say it of the works of Matthew Arnold, because he had a higher purpose than to produce mere literary effects; but we can say it of most of the productions of the younger British essayists and poets. In some of them there is a mere lust of verbal forms and rhythmic lilt. In reading their poems, I soon find myself fairly gasping for breath; I seem to be trying to breathe in a vacuum, — an effect which one does not experience at all in reading Tennyson, or Browning, or Arnold. One is apt to have serious qualms in reading the prose of Walter Pater, the lust of mere style so pervades his work. Faultless workmanship, one says; and yet the best qualities of style — freshness, naturalness, simplicity — are not here. What in Victor Hugo goes far towards atoning for all his sins against art, against sanity and proportion, are his terrible moral earnestness and his psychic power. Whatever we may think of his work, we are not likely to call it "mere literature." That

masterly ubiquitous sporting and toying with the elements of life which we find in Shakespeare we shall probably never again see in letters. The stress and burden of later times do not favor it. The great soul is now too earnest, too self-conscious; life is too serious. Only light men now essay it. With so much criticism, so much knowledge, so much science, another Shakespeare is impossible. Renan says: "In order to establish those literary authorities called classic, something especially healthy and solid is necessary. Common household bread is of more value here than pastry." There can be little doubt that our best literary workers are intent upon producing something analogous to pastry, or even confectionery, — something fine, complex, highly seasoned, that tickles the taste. It is always in order to urge a return to the simple and serious, a return to nature, to works that have the wholesome and sustaining qualities of natural products, — grain, fruits, nuts, air, water.

XII

ANOTHER WORD ON EMERSON

IN one respect many of us feel toward Emerson as a wife feels toward her husband; we like to find fault with him ourselves, but it hurts us to have others do the same. He was a friend of our youth.

Though we may in a measure have outgrown him, and now find his paradoxes, his daring affirmations, his trick of overstatement and understatement less novel and stimulating than we once did, yet we cherish him in our heart of hearts.

The process of maturing, with the spirit as with the body, with man as with the various organic growths, is more or less a hardening and toughening process, — a hardening for strength and endurance. Emerson belongs to the earlier period, before the hardening has progressed far, while the grain of our thoughts is yet in the milk. He appeals to us most strongly in youth or early manhood, when we are not too critical and while we are yet full of brave and generous impulses. A little callow we may be, but buoyant and optimistic. As we grow older something seems to evaporate from him, and one returns to his pages in middle or later life as to the scene of

some youthful festival, half religious, half social, in which he took part, and the memory of which still stirs his emotions.

Emerson finally dropped the church, but he never ceased to be a clergyman. He was like a flower escaped from the garden, and finding a lodgment in an adjoining field, but which never ceased to be a garden flower. A certain sanctity and unworldliness always clung to him, — a certain remoteness from the common thoughts, aims, attractions, of everyday humanity. If he had been a better worldling he would have been a better poet, — that is, if he had had more of the feelings, passions, sympathies and thoughts of ordinary men. These things would have given him more flexibility and brought him closer to human life. Rarely, as poet or prose writer, could he speak in the tone of the people. There was always, more or less concealed, the tone of the pulpit. Mr. James expressed this idea well when he said that Emerson "had no prosaic side relating him to ordinary people."

This prosaic side is very important to the poet, or to any man who would touch and move his fellow-men. We desire our singer or teacher to be of the same flesh and blood as ourselves. Emerson was always a preacher, and his theme, by whatever name he called it, was always religion, or what he called religion, namely, the universality of the moral law.

No lover of Emerson, I imagine, would have had him other than what he was; I certainly would not. At the same time it is a pleasure to explore his limitations and see just what he was, and what he was not. He was a rare soul, probably the most astral genius in English or any other literature. His books are for young men and for those of a religious cast of mind. His signal defect as a writer, as a contributor to the world's literature, arises from this same want of sympathy with the world, — from the select, abridged, circumscribed character of his genius. He did not and could not deal with human life as Montaigne, or Bacon, or Plutarch, or Cicero did.

He was conscious of his defect in this direction, and would fain have had it otherwise. Thus he writes in his journal in 1839: "We would all be public men if we could afford it. I am wholly private; such is the poverty of my constitution. 'Heaven betrayed me to a book and wrapped me in a gown.' I have no social talent, no will, and a steady appetite for insights in any or all directions, to balance my manifold imbecilities." He even quotes approvingly the remark of some one that he "always seemed to be on stilts." "It is even so. Most of the persons whom I see in my own house I see across a gulf. I cannot go to them nor they come to me." He lacked sympathy with men. He cared nothing for persons as such, but only for the genius of humanity which they embodied, and this genius

of humanity he did not find in any sufficiency in ordinary mortals.

He writes in his journal, "I like man, but not men!" He liked ideas, but not things. He dwelt in the abstract, not in the concrete. "In the highest friendship," he says, "we form a league with the Idea of the man who stands to us in that relation — not with the actual person." And his letters, fine and eloquent as most of them are, do not read like a message from one person to another person, but from one Idea to another Idea.

Yet Emerson's leading trait is eminently American; I mean his hospitality toward the new, — the eagerness with which he sought and welcomed the new idea and the new man. Perhaps we might call it his inborn radicalism. No writer ever made such rash, such extreme statements, in the hope that some new truth might be compassed. Anything new and daring instantly challenged his attention. His face was wholly set toward the future, — the new. The past was discredited the moment it became the past. "The coming only is sacred," he said; "no truth so sublime but it may he trivial tomorrow in the light of new thoughts."

As a writer, he sought to make all the old thoughts appear trivial in the light of his audacious affirmations. He stood ready at all times to strike his colors to the man who could bring a larger generalization than his own. All his knowledge, all his opinions,

were at the mercy of the new idea. He did not tread the beaten paths, or seek truth in the logical way; he sought for it by spurts and sallies of the mind. He called himself an "experimenter," and said he did not pretend to settle anything as true or false. "I unsettle all things. No facts are to me sacred; none are profane: I simply experiment; an endless seeker with no Past at my back." In his random, prophetic way he hits on many sublime truths — hits on them by sheer force of affirmation, like the truth of evolution, and of the correlation of forces. Indeed, there are few great thoughts current in our time that were not indicated by the bold guessing of Emerson. The fragmentary and projectile-like character of his thinking is often very effective. He spent no force upon logic, upon fortifying his position, but sent his single bullet as far and as deep as he could. Emerson's hope and confidence in the new is shown in his serious prophecy and expectancy of the coming man.

He was apparently always on the lookout for a new and greater man than had yet appeared. He was always sweeping the horizon for this strange sail. "A new person," he says, "is to me a great event, and keeps me from sleep." He met every stranger with a curious, expectant glance. He looked at you and waited for you to speak, as if the thought, that perhaps here is the man I am waiting for, was never absent from his mind. "If the com-

panions of our childhood," he says, "should turn out to be heroes, and their condition regal, it would not surprise us." But the experience of most persons, I fancy, points just the other way: we are always incredulous when told that our playmates have turned out to be heroes; just as the whole world, except the Emersons in it, are skeptical of the worth of the new idea, or of the new invention.

Emerson does not so much expound a philosophy as he celebrates a sentiment or a law. He does not inculcate a virtue, but quickens our moral sense. He does not teach a religion, but shows all nature as religious. His method is not that of the analyst; he celebrates and presents whole what others give in detail. His mind is deficient in continuity, but strong in affirmation, strong in its separate sallies and flights. He has not a definite, practical bent like Carlyle; he seldom lays his hand on any current evil or want, but rather glorifies the world as it is. He is abstract in his aim, and concrete in his methods. He fixes his eye on the star, but would make it draw his wagon.

Carlyle was like an engine tied to its iron rails, — he turned aside for nothing; Emerson was more like a sailing yacht that hovers about all shores and takes advantage of every breeze.

XIII

THOREAU'S WILDNESS

DOUBTLESS the wildest man New England has turned out since the red aborigines vacated her territory was Henry Thoreau, — a man in whom the Indian reappeared on the plane of taste and morals. One is tempted to apply to him his own lines on "Elisha Dugan," as it is very certain they fit himself much more closely than they ever did his neighbor: —

> "O man of wild habits,
> Partridges and rabbits,
> Who hast no cares,
> Only to set snares,
> Who liv'st all alone
> Close to the bone,
> And where life is sweetest
> Constantly eatest."

His whole life was a search for the wild, not only in nature but in literature, in life, in morals. The shyest and most elusive thoughts and impressions were the ones that fascinated him most, not only in his own mind, but in the minds of others. His

startling paradoxes are only one form his wildness took. He cared little for science, except as it escaped the rules and technicalities, and put him on the trail of the ideal, the transcendental. Thoreau was of French extraction; and every drop of his blood seems to have turned toward the aboriginal, as the French blood has so often done in other ways in this country. He, for the most part, despised the white man; but his enthusiasm kindled at the mention of the Indian. He envied the Indian; he coveted his knowledge, his arts, his woodcraft. He accredited him with a more "practical and vital science" than was contained in the books. "The Indian stood nearer to wild Nature than we." "It was a new light when my guide gave me Indian names for things for which I had only scientific ones before. In proportion as I understood the language, I saw them from a new point of view." And again, "The Indian's earthly life was as far off from us as Heaven is." In his "Week" he complains that our poetry is only white man's poetry. "If we could listen but for an instant to the chant of the Indian muse, we should understand why he will not exchange his savageness for civilization." Speaking of himself, he says, "I am convinced that my genius dates from an older era than the agricultural. I would at least strike my spade into the earth with such careless freedom, but accuracy, as the woodpecker his bill into a tree. There is in my

nature, methinks, a singular yearning toward all wildness." Again and again he returns to the Indian. "We talk of civilizing the Indian, but that is not the name for his improvement. By the wary independence and aloofness of his dim forest life he preserves his intercourse with his native gods, and is admitted from time to time to a rare and peculiar society with Nature. He has glances of starry recognition, to which our saloons are strangers. The steady illumination of his genius, dim only because distant, is like the faint but satisfying light of the stars compared with the dazzling but ineffectual and short-lived blaze of candles." "We would not always be soothing and taming nature, breaking the horse and the ox, but sometimes ride the horse wild, and chase the buffalo." The only relics that interest him are Indian relics. One of his regular spring recreations or occupations is the hunting of arrow-heads. He goes looking for arrow-heads as other people go berrying or botanizing. In his published journal he makes a long entry under date of March 28, 1859, about his pursuit of arrow-heads "I spend many hours every spring," he says, "gathering the crop which the melting snow and rain have washed bare. When, at length, some island in the meadow or some sandy field elsewhere has been plowed, perhaps for rye, in the fall, I take note of it, and do not fail to repair thither as soon as the earth begins to be dry in the spring. If

the spot chances never to have been cultivated before, I am the first to gather a crop from it. The farmer little thinks that another reaps a harvest which is the fruit of his toil." He probably picked up thousands of arrow-heads. He had an eye for them. The Indian in him recognized its own.

His genius itself is arrow-like, and typical of the wild weapon he so loved, — hard, flinty, fine-grained, penetrating, winged, a flying shaft, bringing down its game with marvelous sureness. His literary art was to let fly with a kind of quick inspiration; and though his arrows sometimes go wide, yet it is always a pleasure to watch their aerial course. Indeed, Thoreau was a kind of Emersonian or transcendental red man, going about with a pocket-glass and an herbarium, instead of with a bow and a tomahawk. He appears to have been as stoical and indifferent and unsympathetic as a veritable Indian; and how he hunted without trap or gun, and fished without hook or snare! Everywhere the wild drew him. He liked the telegraph because it was a kind of æolian harp; the wind blowing upon it made wild, sweet music. He liked the railroad through his native town, because it was the wildest road he knew of: it only made deep cuts into and through the hills. "On it are no houses nor foot-travellers. The travel on it does not disturb me. The woods are left to hang over it. Though straight, it is wild

in its accompaniments, keeping all its raw edges. Even the laborers on it are not like other laborers." One day he passed a little boy in the street who had on a home-made cap of woodchuck's skin, and it completely filled his eye. He makes a delightful note about it in his journal. That was the kind of cap to have, — "a perfect little idyl, as they say." Any wild trait unexpectedly cropping out in any of the domestic animals pleased him immensely. The crab-apple was his favorite apple, because of its beauty and perfume. He perhaps never tried to ride a wild horse, but such an exploit was in keeping with his genius.

Thoreau hesitated to call himself a naturalist. That was too tame; he would perhaps have been content to have been an Indian naturalist. He says in this journal, and with much truth and force, "Man cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye. He must look through and beyond her. To look at her is as fatal as to look at the head of Medusa. It turns the man of science to stone." When he was applied to by the secretary of the Association for the Advancement of Science, at Washington, for information as to the particular branch of science he was most interested in, he confesses he was ashamed to answer for fear of exciting ridicule. But he says, "If it had been the secretary of an association of which Plato or Aristotle was the president, I should

not have hesitated to describe my studies at once and particularly." "The fact is, I am a mystic, a transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot." Indeed, what Thoreau was finally after in nature was something ulterior to science, something ulterior to poetry, something ulterior to philosophy; it was that vague something which he calls "the higher law," and which eludes all direct statement. He went to Nature as to an oracle; and though he sometimes, indeed very often, questioned her as a naturalist and a poet, yet there was always another question in his mind. He ransacked the country about Concord in all seasons and weathers, and at all times of the day and night he delved into the ground, he probed the swamps, he searched the waters, he dug into woodchuck holes, into muskrats' dens, into the retreats of the mice and squirrels; he saw every bird, heard every sound, found every wild-flower, and brought home many a fresh bit of natural history; but he was always searching for something he did not find. This search of his for the transcendental, the unfindable, the wild that will not be caught, he has set forth in a beautiful parable in "Walden:" —

"I long ago lost a hound, a bay horse, and a turtle-dove, and am still on their trail. Many are the travellers I have spoken concerning them, describing their tracks, and what calls they answered to. I have met one or two who had heard the hound, and

the tramp of the horse, and even seen the dove disappear behind a cloud; and they seemed as anxious to recover them as if they had lost them themselves."

XIV

NATURE IN LITERATURE

SEVERAL different kinds or phases of this thing we call Nature have at different times appeared in literature. For instance, there is the personified or deified Nature of the towering Greek bards, an expression of Nature born of wonder, fear, childish ignorance, and the tyranny of personality; the Greek was so alive himself that he made everything else alive, and so manly and human that he could see only these qualities in Nature. Or the Greek idyllic poets, whose Nature is simple and fresh like spring water, or the open air, or the taste of milk or fruit or bread. The same thing is perhaps true in a measure of Virgil's Nature. In a later class of writers and artists that arose in Italy, Nature is steeped in the faith and dogmas of the Christian Church; it is a kind of theological Nature.

In English literature there is the artificial Nature of Pope and his class, — a kind of classic liturgy repeated from the books, and as dead and hollow as fossil shells. Earlier than that, the quaint and affected Nature of the Elizabethan poets; later the

melodramatic and wild-eyed Nature of the Byronic muse; and lastly, the transmuted and spiritualized Nature of Wordsworth, which has given the prevailing tone and cast to most modern poetry. Thus, from a goddess Nature has changed to a rustic nymph, a cloistered nun, a heroine of romance, besides other characters not so definite, till she has at last become a priestess of the soul. What will be the next phase is perhaps already indicated in the poems of Walt Whitman, in which Nature is regarded mainly in the light of science, through the immense vistas opened up by astronomy and geology. This poet sees the earth as one of the orbs, and has sought to adjust his imagination to the modern problems and conditions, always taking care, however, to preserve an outlook into the highest regions.

I was much struck with a passage in Whitman's last volume, "Two Rivulets," in which he says that he has not been afraid of the charge of obscurity in his poems, "because human thought, poetry or melody, must have dim escapes and outlets, — must possess a certain fluid, aerial character, akin to space itself, obscure to those of little or no imagination, but indispensable to the highest purposes. Poetic style, when addressed to the soul, is less definite form, outline, sculpture, and becomes vista music, half-tints, and even less than half-tints." I know no ampler justification of a certain elusive quality

there is in the highest poetry — something that refuses to be tabulated or explained, and that is a stumbling-block to many readers — than is contained in these sentences.

XV

SUGGESTIVENESS

THERE is a quality that adheres to one man's writing or speaking, and not to another's, that we call suggestiveness, — something that warms and stimulates the mind of the reader or hearer, quite apart from the amount of truth or information directly conveyed.

It is a precious literary quality, not easy of definition or description. It involves quality of mind, mental and moral atmosphere, points of view, and maybe, racial elements. Not every page or every book carries latent meaning; rarely does any sentence of a writer float deeper than it shows.

Thus, of the great writers of English literature, Dr. Johnson is, to me, the least suggestive, while Bacon is one of the most suggestive. Hawthorne is undoubtedly the most suggestive of our romancers; he has the most atmosphere and the widest and most alluring horizon. Emerson is the most suggestive of our essayists, because he has the deepest ethical and prophetic background. His page is full of moral electricity, so to speak, which begets a state of electric excitement in his reader's mind. Whitman is the

most suggestive of our poets; he elaborates the least and gives us in profusion the buds and germs of poetry. A musical composer once said to me that Whitman stimulated him more than Tennyson, because he left more for him to do, — he abounded in hints and possibilities that the musician's mind eagerly seized.

This quality is not related to ambiguity of phrase or to cryptic language or to vagueness and obscurity. It goes, or may go, with perfect lucidity, as in Matthew Arnold at his best, while it is rarely present in the pages of Herbert Spencer. Spencer has great clearness and compass, but there is nothing resonant in his style, — nothing that stimulates the imagination. He is a great workman, but the metal he works in is not of the kind called precious.

The late roundabout and enigmatical style of Henry James is far less fruitful in his readers' minds than his earlier and more direct one, or than the limpid style of his compeer, Mr. Howells. The indirect and elliptical method may undoubtedly be so used as to stimulate the mind; at the same time there may be a kind of inconclusiveness and beating around the bush that is barren and wearisome. Upon the page of the great novelist there fall, more or less distinct, all the colors of the spectrum of human life; but Mr. James in his later works seems intent only upon the invisible rays of the spectrum, and his readers grope in the darkness accordingly.

In the world of experience and observation the suggestiveness of things is enhanced by veils, concealments, half lights, flowing lines. The twilight is more suggestive than the glare of noonday, a rolling field than a lawn, a winding road than a straight one. In literature perspective, indirection, understatement, side glimpses, have equal value; a vocabulary that is warm from the experience of the writer, sentences that start a multitude of images, that abound in the concrete and the specific, that shun vague generalities, — with these goes the power of suggestiveness.

Beginnings, outlines, summaries, are suggestive, while the elaborated, the highly wrought, the perfected afford us a different kind of pleasure. The art that fills and satisfies us has one excellence, and the art that stimulates and makes us ahungry has another. All beginnings in nature afford us a peculiar pleasure. The early spring with its hints and dim prophecies, the first earth odors, the first robin or song sparrow, the first furrow, the first tender skies, the first rainbow, the first wild flower, the dropping bud scales, the awakening voices in the marshes, — all these things touch and move us in a way that later developments in the season do not. What meaning, too, in the sunrise and the sunset, in the night with its stars, the sea with its tides and currents, the morning with its dews, autumn with its bounty, winter with its snows, the desert with its

sands, — in everything in the germ and in the bud, — in parasites, suckers, blights, in floods, tempests, droughts! The winged seeds carry thoughts, the falling leaves make us pause, the clinging burrs have a tongue, the pollen dust, not less than meteoric dust, conveys a hint of the method of nature.

Some things and events in our daily experience are more typical, and therefore more suggestive, than others. Thus the sower striding across the ploughed field is a walking allegory, or parable. Indeed the whole life of the husbandman, — his first-hand relation to things, his ploughing, his planting, his fertilizing, his draining, his pruning, his grafting, his uprootings, his harvestings, his separating of the wheat from the chaff, and the tares from the wheat, his fencing his field with the stones and boulders that hindered his plough or cumbered his sward, his making the wilderness blossom as the rose, — all these things are pleasant to contemplate because in them there is a story within a story, we translate the facts into higher truths.

In like manner, the shepherd with his flocks, the seaman with his compass and rudder, the potter with his clay, the weaver with his warp and woof, the sculptor with his marble, the painter with his canvas and pigments, the builder with his plans and scaffoldings, the chemist with his solvents and precipitants, the surgeon with his scalpel and antiseptics, the lawyer with his briefs, the preacher with

his text, the fisherman with his nets, — all are more or less symbolical and appeal to the imagination.

In both prose and poetry, there is the suggestiveness of language used in a vivid, imaginative way, and the suggestiveness of words redolent of human association, words of deep import, as friend, home, love, marriage.

To me Shakespeare's sonnets are the most suggestive sonnets in the language, because they so abound in words, images, allusions drawn from real life; they are the product of a mind vividly acted upon by near-by things, that uses language steeped in the common experience of mankind. The poet drew his material not from the strange and the remote, but, as it were, from the gardens and thoroughfares of life. Does not that poetry or prose work touch us the most nearly that deals with that with which we are most familiar? One thing that separates the minor poet from the major is that the thoughts and words of the minor poet are more of the nature of asides, or of the exceptional; he does not take in the common and universal; we are not familiar with the points of view that so agitate him; and he has not the power to make them real to us. I read poems every day that provoke the thought, "Well, that is all news to me. I do not know that heaven or that earth, those men or those women," — all is so shadowy, fantastic, and unreal. But when you enter the world of the great poets you find yourself upon solid

ground; the sky and the earth, and the things in them and upon them, are what you have always known, and not for a moment are you called upon to breathe in a vacuum, or to reverse your upright position to see the landscape. Dante even makes hell as tangible and real as the objects of our senses, if not more so.

Then there is the suggestiveness or kindling power of pregnant, compact sentences, — type thoughts, compendious phrases, — vital distinctions or generalizations, such as we find scattered through literature, as when De Quincey says of the Roman that he was great in the presence of man, never in the presence of nature; or his distinction between the literature of power and the literature of knowledge, or similar illuminating distinctions in the prose of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Arnold, Goethe, Lessing. Arnold's dictum that poetry is a criticism of life, is suggestive, because it sets you thinking to verify or to disprove it. John Stuart Mill was not what one would call a suggestive writer, yet the following sentence, which Mr. Augustine Birrell has lately made use of, makes a decided ripple in one's mind: "I have learnt from experience that many false opinions may be exchanged for true ones without in the least altering the habits of mind of which false opinions are the result." In a new home writer whose first books are but a year or two old, I find deeply suggestive sentences on nearly every page.

Here are two or three of them: "In your inmost soul you are as well suited to the whole cosmical order and every part of it as to your own body. You belong here. Did you suppose that you belonged to some other world than this, or that you belonged nowhere at all, just a waif on the bosom of the eternities? . . . Conceivably He might have flung you into a world that was unrelated to you, and might have left you to be acclimated at your own risk; but you happen to know that this is not the case. You have lived here always; this is the ancestral demesne; for ages and ages you have looked out of these same windows upon the celestial landscape and the star-deeps. You are at home." "How perverse and pathetic the desires of the animals! But they all get what they ask for, — long necks and trunks, flapping ears and branching horns and corrugated hides, anything, if only they will believe in life and try." [1]

The intuitional and affirmative writers, to which class our new author belongs, and the most notable example of which, in this country, was Emerson, are, as a rule, more suggestive than the clearly demonstrating and logical writers. A challenge to the soul seems to mean more than an appeal to the reason; an audacious affirmation often irradiates the mind in a way that a logical sequence of thought does not. Science rarely suggests more than it says;

[1] *The Religion of Democracy.* By Charles Ferguson.

but in the hands of an imaginative man like Maeterlinck a certain order of facts in natural history becomes fraught with deepest meaning, as may be witnessed in his wonderful "Life of the Bee," — one of the most enchanting and poetic contributions to natural history ever made. Darwin's work upon the earthworm, and upon the cross fertilization of flowers, in the same way seems to convey more truth to the reader than is warranted by the subject.

The writer who can touch the imagination has the key, at least one key, to suggestiveness. This power often goes with a certain vagueness and indefiniteness, as in the oft-quoted lines from one of Shakespeare's sonnets: —

> "the prophetic soul
> Of the wide world dreaming on things to come;"

a very suggestive, but not a clearly intelligible passage.

Truth at the centre, straightly put, excites the mind in one way, and truth at the surface, or at the periphery of the circle, indirectly put, excites it in another way and for other reasons; just as a light in a dark place, which illuminates, appeals to the eye in a different way from the light of day falling through vapors or colored glass, wherein objects become softened and illusory.

A common word may be so used as to have an

unexpected richness of meaning, as when Coleridge speaks of those books that "find" us; or Shakespeare of the "marriage of true minds," or Whitman of the autumn apple hanging "indolent-ripe" on the tree. Probably that language is the most suggestive that is the most concrete, that is drawn most largely from the experience of life, that savors of real things. The Saxon English of Walton or Barrow is more suggestive than the latinized English of Johnson or Gibbon.

Indeed, the quality I am speaking of is quite exceptional in the eighteenth-century writers. It is much more abundant in the writers of the seventeenth century. It goes much more with the vernacular style, the homely style, than with the polished academic style.

With the stream of English literature of the nineteenth century has mingled a current of German thought and mysticism, and this has greatly heightened its power of suggestiveness both in poetry and in prose. It is not in Byron or Scott or Campbell or Moore or Macaulay or Irving, but it is in Wordsworth and Coleridge and Landor and Carlyle and Ruskin and Blake and Tennyson and Browning and Emerson and Whitman, — a depth and richness of spiritual and emotional background that the wits of Pope's and Johnson's times knew not of. It seems as if the subconscious self played a much greater part in the literature of the nineteenth century than

of the eighteenth, probably because this term has been recently added to our psychology.

As a rule it may be said that the more a writer condenses, the more suggestive his work will be. There is a sort of mechanical equivalent between the force expended in compacting a sentence and the force or stimulus it imparts again to the reader's mind. A diffuse writer is rarely or never a suggestive one. Poetry is, or should be, more suggestive than prose, because it is the result of a more compendious and sublimating process. The mind of the poet is more tense, he uses language under greater pressure of emotion than the prose writer, whose medium of expression gives his mind more play-room. The poet often succeeds in focusing his meaning or emotion in a single epithet, and he alone gives us the resounding, unforgettable line. There are pregnant sentences in all the great prose writers; there are immortal lines only in the poets.

Whitman said the word he would himself use as most truly descriptive of his "Leaves of Grass" was the word suggestiveness. "I round and finish little, if anything; and could not consistently with my scheme. The reader will always have his or her part to do, just as much as I have had mine. I seek less to state or display my theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought — there to pursue your own

flight." These sentences themselves are suggestive, because they bring before the mind a variety of definite actions, as finishing a thing, displaying a thing, doing your part, pursuing your own flight, and yet the idea conveyed has a certain subtlety and elusiveness. The suggestiveness of his work as a whole probably lies in its blending of realism and mysticism, and in the art of it running parallel to or in some way tallying with the laws and processes of nature. It stimulates thought and criticism as few modern works do.

Of course the suggestiveness of any work — poem, picture, novel, essay — depends largely upon what we bring to it; whether we bring a kindred spirit or an alien one, a full mind or an empty one, an alert sense or a dull one. If you have been there, so to speak, if you have passed through the experience described, if you have known the people portrayed, if you have thought, or tried to think, the thoughts the author exploits, the work will have a deeper meaning to you than to one who is a stranger to these things. The best books make us acquainted with our own, — they help us to find ourselves. No book calls forth the same responses from two different types of mind. The wind does not awaken æolian-harp tones from cornstalks. No man is a hero to his valet. It is the deep hollows and passes of the mountains that give back your voice in prolonged reverberations. The tides are in the sea, not

in the lakes and ponds. Words of deep import do not mean much to a child. The world of books is under the same law as these things. What any given work yields us depends largely upon what we bring to it.

XVI

ON THE RE-READING OF BOOKS

AFTER one has passed the middle period of life, or even long before that, it is interesting to note what books he spontaneously recurs to and re-reads. Do his old favorites retain anything of their first freshness and stimulus for him, or have they become stale and trite, or completely outgrown? On taking down for the third or fourth time a favorite author the present winter, I said to myself, "There is no test of a book like that: can we, and do we, go back to it?" If not, is it at all probable that future generations will go back to it? One's own experience may be looked upon as the experience of the race in miniature. If one cannot return to an author again and again, is it not pretty good evidence that his work has not the keeping qualities? One brings a different self, a different experience, to each re-reading, and thus in a measure brings the test of time and humanity. Yet there is always some difficulty in going back. It is difficult to go back, after some years, to live in a place from which one has once flitted. Somehow things look stale to us. Is it our dead selves that we encounter at every turn?

Even the old homestead has a certain empty, pathetic, forlorn look. In the journey of life there is always more or less pain in going back; and I suppose it is partly because in every place in which we have lived we have had pain, and partly because there is some innate dislike in us to going back; the watchword of the soul is onward. If the book has given us pain, we cannot return to it; and our second or third or fourth pleasure in it will be in proportion to the depth and genuineness of our first. If our pleasure was in the novelty or strangeness or unexpectedness of the thing, it will not return, or only in small measure. Stories of exciting plots, I find, one can seldom re-read. One can go back to the "Vicar of Wakefield;" but can he read a second time "The Woman in White"? In such books there can be only one first time. Pluck out the heart of a mystery once, and it never grows again. Curiosity and astonishment make a poor foundation to build upon. The boy tires of his jumping-jack much sooner than of his top or ball. Only the normal, the sane, the simple, have the gift of long life; the strained, the intemperate, the violent will not live out half their days. We never outgrow our pleasure in simple, common things; if we do, so much the worse for us; and I think it will be found that those books to which we return and that stand the test of time have just this quality of simple, universal, every-day objects and experiences, with, of

course, some glint of that light that never was on sea or land, — the light of the spirit. How many times does a reading man return to Montaigne, not to make a dead set at him, but to dip into him here and there, as one takes a cup of water from a spring! Human nature is essentially the same in all ages; and Montaigne put so much of his genuine, unaffected self into his pages, and put it with such vivacity of style, that all men find their own in his book; it is forever modern. We return to Bacon for a different reason, — the breadth and excellence of his wisdom, and his masterly phrases. The excellent is always modern; only, what is excellent?

A man of my own tastes re-reads Gilbert White two or three times, and dips into him many times more. It is easy to see why such a book lasts. So much writing there is that is like half-live coals buried in ashes; but here there are no ashes, no dead verbiage at all; we are in immediate contact with a live, simple, unaffected mind and personality. But this general description applies to all books that last; they all have at least one quality in common, living reality. What is special to White is his fine, scholarly style, busied with the common, homely things of every-day country life. The facts are just enough heightened and related to the life of this man to make them of perennial interest.

We probably go back to books from two motives: one, because we want to recover some past mood or

experience to which the book may be the key; and the other from the perennial sources of pleasure and profit which a good book holds; in other words for association and inspiration.

I suppose it was with some such motives as these that I recently opened the "Autocrat" after the pages had been closed to me for over a quarter of a century. To recover as far as possible the spirit of the old days, I got out the identical numbers of the "Atlantic" in which I had first read those sparkling sentences. Life to me had the freshness and buoyancy of the morning hours in those first years of the great Boston magazine. I recall how impatiently I waited for each number to appear, and how, on one occasion at least, I ran all the way home from the post-office with the new issue in my hand, so eager was I to be alone with it in my room. I remember, too, how I resented the criticism of a schoolmate, then at Harvard College, who said that Holmes was not the great writer I fancied him to be, but only a *Boston* great writer.

Well, I found places in the "Autocrat" that would not bear much pressure, — thin places where a lively rhetoric alone carried the mind over. And I found much that was sound and solid, that would not give way beneath one under any pressure he could bring.

When Dr. Holmes got hold of a real idea, as he often did, he could exploit it in as taking a way as any man who has lived; but frequently, I think, he

got hold of sham or counterfeit ideas; and these, with all his skill in managing them, will not stand the pressure of time. (His classing poems with meerschaum pipes, as two things that improve with use, is an instance of what I mean by his sham ideas.)

As a writer Dr. Holmes always reminded me of certain of our bird songsters, such as the brown thrasher or the catbird, whose performances always seem to imply a spectator and to challenge his admiration. The vivacious doctor always seemed to write with his eye upon his reader, and to calculate in advance upon his reader's surprise and pleasure. If the world finally neglects his work, it will probably be because it lacks the deep seriousness of the enduring productions.

Yet this test of re-reading is, of course, only an approximate one. So great an authority as Hume said it was sufficient to read Cowley once, but that Parnell after the fiftieth reading was as fresh as at the first. Now, for my part, I have to go to the encyclopædia to find out who Parnell was, but of Cowley even desultory readers like myself know something. His essays one can not only read, but reread. They make one of the unpretentious minor books that one can put in his pocket and take with him on a walk to the woods, and nibble at under a tree or by a waterfall. Solitude seems to bring out its quality, as it does that of some people.

In our intellectual experience there can probably

be but one first time. We go back to an author again and again; yet in all save a few exceptional cases, the pleasure of the second or third reading is only a lesser degree of the first. On the other hand, a favorite piece of music one may hear with the same keen delight any number of times. Is it because music is so largely made up of the sensuous, at least to a greater extent than is any other phase of art? It is the same with perfumes, flavors, colors: they never lose their first freshness to us. But a book or a poem we absorb and exhaust more or less, — that is, as to its intellectual content; and if we return to it, it is probably for some charm or quality that is to the spirit what music or perfume or color is to the senses, or what a congenial companion is to our social instincts. We shall not go back to a book that does not in some way, apart from its mere intellectual service, relate itself to our lives.

Time tries all things, and surely does it sift out the false and fugitive in books. Contemporary judgment is usually unreliable. It is like trial by jury, the local and accidental play so large a part in the verdict. The next age, or the next, forms the higher court of appeal. In the same way a man's future self corrects or sets aside his verdict of to-day. If in later life he reaffirms his first opinion, the chances are that time is on his side. There is, of course, a sense or a degree in which any book that one has once read becomes a sucked orange; but some books

become much more so than others. I doubt if many of us find books that, like a few people, become dearer to us as time passes, and to which we always return with increasing interest. And the reason is that one's mental and spiritual outlook is not uniformly the same, while his social and human wants, such as his need of food and warmth, do remain about the same. One in a measure absorbs the book and puts it behind him. It is like a place he has visited: he has had the view, and until the impression is more or less obliterated he does not care to repeat it. But one's friend is always a fresh stimulus: he keeps the past alive for him (which the book can also do in a measure), and he consecrates the present (which the book cannot do). Indeed, the sense of companionship which one can have in a book is but a faint echo or shadow of the companionship he has with persons. Yet this sense of companionship does adhere to some books much more vividly than to others. They are our books; they were written for us; they become a part of our lives, and they do not drop away from us with the lapse of time, as do others. Different readers have felt this way about such writers as Emerson, Carlyle, Wordsworth, and Whitman: but it may be a question how writers who make the intense personal appeal that these men make will wear. Are they too special and individual for future generations to recognize close kinship with? Will each age have its own doctors and

saviors, and go back only for lovers and for the touch of nature that makes all the world kin? I know not; yet it is apparent that he who stands upon the common ground where all men stand, and by the magic of his genius makes poetry and romance out of that, has the best chance to endure. Only so far as the writers named, or any writers, represent states of mind and spirit that are likely to return again and again, and not to be outgrown in the progress of the race, are we likely to come back to them, or is the future likely to feel an interest in them. A path or road becomes obsolete when there are no more travelers going that way; and an author becomes obsolete when there are no more readers going *his* way.

For my part, I find myself returning again and again to the works of the men named, but, of course, with the cooled ardor that years bring to every man. I feel that I am less near the end with Whitman than with any of the others; he is the most stimulating to my intellect, because he suggests the most far-reaching problems. I re-read Wordsworth as I walk again along familiar paths that lead to the sequestered and the idyllic. I climb the Whitman mountain when I want a big view, and a wide horizon, and a glimpse of the unknown.

I think the service most of us get from Carlyle is a moral rather than an intellectual one. He was to his generation more like a much-needed drastic tonic

remedy than like a simple hygienic regimen; we get the virtue of him now in a thousand ways without re-reading him. Hence there are more chances of our outgrowing him than of our outgrowing some lesser but more normal men. In a measure, I think, this is true of Emerson, but not entirely so. Emerson has charm; he has illusion; he has the witchery of the ideal. He is like the wise doctor whose presence, whose reassuring smile, and whose cheerful prognosis do more for the patient than anything else. We want him to come again and again. To re-read his first essays, his "Representative Men," his "English Traits," and many of his poems, is again to hear music, to breathe perfume, or to walk in a spring twilight when the evening star throbs above the hill.

One winter night I tried to re-read Carlyle's "Past and Present" and certain of his "Latter-Day Pamphlets;" but I found I could not, and thanked my stars that I did not have to. It was like riding a spirited but bony horse bareback. There was tremendous "go" in the beast; but oh, the bruises from those knotty and knuckle-like sentences! But the "Life of Sterling" I have found I can re-read with delight; it has a noble music. Certain of the essays, also, such as the ones on Scott, Burns, and Johnson, have a perennial quality. Parts of "Frederick" I mean to read again, and the "Reminiscences." I have re-read "Sartor Resartus," but it

was a task, hardly a pleasure. Nearly four fifths of the book, I should say, is chaff; but the other fifth is real wheat, if you are not choked in getting it. Yet I have just read the story of an educated tramp who carried the book in his blanket thousands of miles and knew it nearly by heart. Carlyle wrote as he talked; his "Latter-Day Pamphlets" are harangues that it would have been a delight to hear, but in the printed page we miss the guiding tone and emphasis, and above all do we miss the laugh that mollified the bitter words. One can stand, or even welcome, in life what may be intolerable in print; put the same thing in a book, and it is the pudding without the sauce, and cold at that. The colloquial style is good, or the best, if perfectly easy and simple. In reading aloud we teach our children to read as they speak, and thus make the words their own. The same thing holds in writing; the less formal, the less *written*, the sentences are, or the more they are like familiar speech, the more genuine and real the writing seems, the more it becomes one's own; but when the form and manner of spoken sentences are very pronounced, they become tiresome when transferred to print. Carlyle will doubtless hold his place in English literature, but he is terribly handicapped in some of his books by his crabbed, raw-boned style.

What reading man does not re-read Boswell's "Johnson" two or three times in the course of his life? The charm of this is that it is so much like

the spoken word, and so filled with the presence of the living man. Another volume of a similar kind, which I have read three times and dipped into any number of times, is Eckermann's "Conversations with Goethe." It is a pregnant book; in fact, I know no such armory of critical wisdom anywhere else as this book contains. Its human interest may not be equal to Boswell, though I find this very great; but as an intellectual excitant it is vastly superior.

It is a profitable experience for one who read Dickens forty years ago to try to read him now. Last winter I forced myself through the "Tale of Two Cities." It was a sheer dead pull from start to finish. It all seemed so insincere, such a transparent make-believe, a mere piece of acting. My sympathies were hardly once touched. I was not insensible to the marvelous genius displayed in the story, but it left me cold and unmoved. A feeling of unreality haunted me on every page. The fault may have been my own. I give myself reluctantly to a novel, yet I love to be entirely mastered by one. But my poor success with this one, of course, makes me think that Dickens's hold upon the future is not at all secure. A man of wonderful talents, but of no deep seriousness; a matchless mimic through and through, and nothing else. But I am proud to add that my boy, a youth of eighteen, reads his books with great enthusiasm.

Natural, irrepressible humor is always welcome; but the humor of the grotesque, the exaggerated, the distorted, is like a fashion in dress: it has its day. How surely we tire of the loud, the too pronounced, the merely peculiar, whether it be in carpets and wall-papers, or in books and art! The common, the average, the universal, quickened with a new spirit, imbued with a vernal freshness — that is the stuff of enduring works.

One often wonders what is the secret of the vitality of such a book as Dana's "Two Years before the Mast." Each succeeding generation reads it with the same pleasure. I can myself re-read it every ten or a dozen years. Parkman's "Oregon Trail" has much of the same perennial charm as has Franklin's autobiography.

How far perfect seriousness and good faith carry in literature! Why should they not count for just as much here as in life? They count in anything. The least bit of acting and pretense, and the words ring false. The effort of the writer of books like "Two Years before the Mast" is always entirely serious and truthful; his eye is single; he has no vanities to display before the reader. Compare this book with such a record as Stevenson's "Inland Voyage" or his "Travels with a Donkey." Here the effort is mainly literary, and we get the stimulus of words rather than of things; we are one remove more from reality.

General Grant's "Memoirs," I think, are likely to last, because of their deep seriousness and good faith. The effort here is not a literary one, but a real one. The writer is not occupied with his manner, but with his matter. Had Grant had any literary vanity or ambition, is it at all probable that his narrative would cleave to us as it does? The near presence of death would probably cure any man of his vanity, if he had any; but Grant never had any.

I have always felt that Tennyson's famous poem "Crossing the Bar" did not ring quite true, because it was not conceived in a spirit serious enough for the occasion. The poetic effort is too obvious; the pride of the verse is too noticeable; it bedecks itself with pretty fancies. The last solemn strain of Whitman, wherein he welcomes death as the right hand of God, strikes a far deeper chord, I think. As in the Biblical writers, the literary effort is entirely lost in the religious faith and fervor. We do not want a thing too much written; in fact, we do not want it written at all, but spoken directly from the heart. It is in this respect that I think Wordsworth's poetry, at its best, is better than Tennyson's. It is more inevitable; it wrote itself; the poetic intention is not so obvious; the art of the singer is more completely effaced by his inspiration.

There are probably few readers of the critical literature of the times who do not recur again and

again to Matthew Arnold's criticism, not only for the charm of the style, but for the currents of vital thought which it holds. One may not always agree with Arnold, but for that very reason one will go back to see how it is possible to differ from a man who sees so clearly and feels so justly. Of course, Arnold's view is not final, any more than is that of any other man; but it is always fit, and challenges your common sense. After the muddle and puddle of most literary criticism, the reader of Arnold feels like a traveler who has got out of the confusion of brush and bog into clean and clear open spaces, where the ground is firm, and where he can see his course.

> "Where'er the trees grow biggest,
> Huntsmen find the easiest way,"

says Emerson, and for a similar reason the way is always easy and inviting through Arnold's pages.

But his theological criticism has less charm; and, for my part, I doubt if it will survive. I once seriously tried to re-read his "Literature and Dogma," but stuck before I had got halfway through it. I suppose I found too much dogma in it. Arnold makes a dogma out of what he calls the "method and secret of Jesus," his "method of *inwardness*" and "*secret of self-renunciation;*" he iterates and reiterates these phrases till one never wants to hear them again. Arnold's besetting sin of giving a quasi-

scientific value to certain literary terms here has free rein, and one finds only a new kind of inflexibility in place of the one he condemns. Sir Thomas Browne directed a free play of mind upon the old dogmas, and the result was the "Religio Medici," a work which each generation treasures and re-reads, not because of the dogma, but because of the literature; it is a rare specimen of vital, flexible, imaginative writing. It is full of soul, like Emerson's "Divinity School Address," which sought to dissolve certain of the old dogmas. In both these authors we are made free as the spirit makes free; but in Arnold's criticism we are made free only as a liberal Anglicanism makes free, which is not much.

The books that we do not like to part with after we have read them, that we like to keep near us, — like Amiel's "Journal," say, — are probably the books that our children's children will like to have around. A Western woman once paid an Eastern author this rare compliment. "Most of the new books," she said, "we see at the public library; but your books we always buy, because we like to have them in the house." Probably it is the personal element in a book, the quality of the writer, that alone endears it to us. If we could not love the man, is it probable that we can love his book?

Of our New England poets, I find myself taking down Emerson oftener than any other; then Bryant;

occasionally Longfellow for a few poems; then Whittier for "The Playmate" or "Snow-bound;" and least of all, Lowell. I am not so vain as to think that the measure of my appreciation of these poets is the measure of their merit; but as this writing is so largely autobiographical, I must keep to the facts. As the pathos and solemnity of life deepen with time, I think one finds only stray poems, or parts of poems, in the New England anthology that adequately voice them; and these he finds in Emerson more plentifully than anywhere else, though in certain of Longfellow's sonnets there is adequacy also. The one on "Sumner," beginning, —

> River, that stealest with such silent pace,

easily fixed itself in my mind.

I think we go back to books not so much for the amount of pleasure we have had in them, as the kind of pleasure. There is a pleasure both in books and in life that is inconsistent with health and wholeness, and there is a pleasure that is consistent with these things. The instinct of self-preservation makes us cleave to the latter. I do not think we go back to the exciting books, — they do not usually leave a good taste in the mouth; neither to the dull books, which leave no taste at all in the mouth; but to the quiet, mildly tonic and stimulating books, — books that have the virtues of sanity and good nature, and that keep faith with us.

At any rate, an enduring fame is of slow growth. The man of the moment is rarely the man of the eternities. If your name is upon all men's tongues to-day, some other name is likely to be there to-morrow.

XVII

THE SPELL OF THE PAST

I NOTICE that as a man grows old he is more and more fond of quoting his father, — what he said, what he did. It has more and more force or authority with him. It is a tribute to the past. Not until one has reached the meridian of life or gone beyond it, does the spell of the past begin to creep over him.

Said a middle-aged woman to me the other day, "Old people are beginning to look very good to me; I like to be near them and to hear them talk." It is a common experience. I have seen many a granny on the street whom I felt like kidnapping, taking home, and seating in my chimney corner, for the sake of the fragrance and pathos of the past which hovered about her; for the sake also, I suppose, of the filial yearning which is pretty sure to revive in one after a certain time.

No woman can ever know the depths of her love for her mother until she has become a mother herself, and no man knows the depths of his love for his father until he has become a father. When we have experienced what they experienced, when we

have traveled over the road which they traveled over, they assume a new value, a new sacredness in our eyes. They are then our former selves, and a peculiarly tender regard for them awakens in our hearts. There is pathos in the fact that so many people lose their parents before the experiences of life have brought about that final flavoring and ripening of the filial instinct to which I refer.

After one has lived half a century, and maybe long before, his watch begins to lose time; the years come faster than he is ready for them; while he is yet occupied with the old the new is upon him. How alien and unfriendly seem the new years, strangers whom we reluctantly entertain for a time but with whom we seem hardly to get on speaking terms, — with what uncivil haste they come rushing in! One writes down the figures on his letters or in his journals, but they all seem alien; before one has become at all intimate with them, so that they come to mean anything special to him, they are gone. While he is yet occupied with the sixties, living upon the thoughts and experiences which they brought him, the seventies have come and gone and the eighties have knocked at his door.

The earlier years one took to his heart as he did his early friends. How much we made of them; what varied hues and aspects they wore; how we came to know each other; how rounded and complete were all things! Ah, the old friends and the old years,

we cannot separate them; they had a quality and an affinity for us that we cannot find in the new. The new years and the new friends come and go, and leave no impression. Youth makes all the world plastic; it creates all things anew; youth is Adam in Paradise, from which the burdens and the experiences of manhood will by and by cause him to depart with longing and sorrow. "When we were young," says Schopenhauer, "we were completely absorbed in our immediate surroundings; there was nothing to distract our attention from them; we looked upon the objects about us as though they were the only ones of their kind, — as though, indeed, nothing else existed at all."

It is perhaps inevitable that a man of sensibility and imagination should grow conservative as he grows old. The new is more and more distasteful to him. Did you ever go back to the old homestead where you had passed your youth or your early manhood, and find the old house, the old barn, the old orchard, in fact all the old landmarks gone? What a desecration, you thought. The new buildings, how hateful they look to you! They mean nothing to you but the obliteration of that which meant so much. This experience proves nothing except that the past becomes a part of our very selves; our roots, our beginnings, are there, and we bleed when old things are cut away.

After a certain age is reached, how trivial and

flitting seem the new generations! The people whom we found upon the stage when we came into the world, — the middle-aged and the elderly people who were bearing the brunt of the battle, — they seem important and like a part of the natural system of things. When they pass away what a void they leave! Those who take their places, the new set, do not seem to fill the bill at all. But the chances are that they are essentially the same class of people, and will seem as permanent and important to our children as the old people did to us.

To repeat the experience, go to a strange town and take up your abode. Everybody seems in his proper place, there are no breaks, we miss nothing, the social structure is complete. In a quarter of a century go back to the place again; ruins everywhere, nearly all the old landmarks gone, and a new generation upon the stage. But to the newcomer nothing of this is visible; he finds everything established and in order as we first found it. It is so in life. Our children are the newcomers who do not and cannot go behind the visible scene.

We are always wondering who are going to take the place of the great poets, the great preachers, the great statesmen and orators who are passing away. We see the new men, but they are not the worthy successors of these. The great ones are all old or dead. The new ones we know not; they cannot be to us what the others were; they cannot be the star

actors in the drama in which we have played a part, and therefore we fancy they are of little account.

Are there any genuine old men any more? Why, the old men, the real ones, are all dead long ago; we knew them in our youth; they were always old, old from the foundations of the world. These old men of to-day are mere imitations; we can remember when they were not old, — it is all put on. The grandfathers and the grandmothers whom we knew — think of any present-day grandparents being anything more than mere counterfeits of them!

Hence, also, the new generation always go astray according to the old, and run after strange gods. "And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers; and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel."

How ready we are to believe in the past as against the present; to believe that wonders happened then that do not happen now! Miracles happened then, but not now. The Divine One came upon earth then, but he comes no more! Our whole religion is of the past. How hard to believe in a present revelation, or to believe in the advantages and opportunities of the present hour!

From the standpoint of each of us the sunrise and the sunset seem like universal facts; it must be evening or morning throughout the world, we think, instead of just here on our meridian. In the same

way we are prone to look upon youth and age as commensurate with human existence; the world was young when we were young, and it grows old as we grow old; youth and age we think are not subjective experiences, but objective realities.

How can these youths here by our side feel as we have felt, see what we have seen, have the same joys and sorrows, the same friends, the same experiences, see the world clad in the same hues, feel the same ties of home, of father and mother, of school and comrades, when all the world is so changed, — when these things and persons that were so much to us are forever past? What is there left? How can life bring to them what it brought to us? But it will. The same story is told over and over to each succeeding generation, and each finds it new and true for them alone. As we find our past in others, so our youths will find their past in us, and find it unique and peculiar.

The lives of men are like the sparks that shoot upward; the same in the first ages as in the last, each blazing its brief moment as it leaps forth, some attaining a greater brilliancy or a higher flight than others, but all ending at last in the same black obscurity. Or they are like the waves that break upon the shore; one generation following swift upon the course of another, repeating the same evolutions and crumbling and vanishing in the same way.

Probably no man ever lost his father or his mother

or his bosom friend without feeling that no one else could ever have had just such an experience. Carlyle, in writing to Emerson shortly after each had lost his mother, said, "You too have lost your good old mother, who stayed with you like mine, clear to the last; alas, alas, it is the oldest Law of Nature; and it comes on every one of us with a strange originality, as if it had never happened before!"

Speaking of these two rare men, each so attractive to the other, how unlike they were in their attitude toward the past, — the one with that yearning, wistful, backward glance, bearing the burden of an Old World sorrow and remorse, long generations of baffled, repressed, struggling humanity coming to full consciousness in him; the other serene, hopeful, optimistic, with the spell of the New World upon him, turning cheerfully and confidently to the future! Emerson describes himself as an endless seeker with no past at his back. He seemed to have no regrets, no wistful retrospections. His mood is affirmative and expectant. The power of the past was not upon him, but it had laid its hand heavily upon his British brother, so heavily that at times it almost overpowered him. Carlyle's dominant note is distinctively that of retrospection. He yearns for the old days. The dead call to him from their graves. In the present he sees little, from the future he expects less; all is in the past. How he magnifies it, how he recreates it and reads his own heroic temper into it!

The twelfth century is more to him than the nineteenth.

It is true that the present time is more or less prosy, vulgar, commonplace to most men; not till we have lived it and colored it with our own experiences does it begin to draw us. This seems to have been preëminently the case with Carlyle; he was morbidly sensitive to the crude and prosy present, and almost preternaturally alive to the glamour of the past. What men had done, what they had touched with their hands, what they had colored with their lives, that was sacred to him.

Is it not a common experience that as we grow old there comes more and more a sense of solitude and exposure? Life does not shut us in and house us as it used to do. One by one the barriers and wind-breaks are taken down, and we become more and more conscious of the great cosmic void that encompasses us. Our friends were walls that shielded us; see the gaps in their ranks now. Our parents were like the roof over our heads; what a sense of shelter they gave us! Then our hopes, our enthusiasms, how they housed us, or peopled and warmed the void! A keen living interest in things, what an armor against the shafts of time is that! Always on the extreme verge of time, this moment that now passes is the latest moment of all the eternities. *New* time always. The old time we cannot keep. The old house, the old fields, and in

a measure the old friends may be ours, but the atmosphere that bathed them all, the sentiment that gave to them hue, this is from within and cannot be kept.

Time does not become sacred to us until we have lived it, until it has passed over us and taken with it a part of ourselves. While it is here we value it not, — it is like raw material not yet woven into the texture and pattern of our lives; but the instant it is gone and becomes yesterday, or last spring, or last year, how tender and pathetic it looks to us! The shore of time! I think of it as a shore constantly pushing out into the infinite sea, stretching farther and farther back of us like a fair land idealized by distance into which we may not again enter. The future is alien and unknown, but the past is a part of ourselves. So many ties bind us to it. The past is the cemetery of our days. There they lie, every one of them. Musingly we recall their faces and the gifts they brought us, — the friends, the thoughts, the experiences, the joys, the sorrows; many of them we have quite forgotten, but they were all dear to us once.

If our friends should come back from their graves, could they be what they once were to us? Not unless our dead selves came back also. How precious and pathetic the thought of father and mother to all men; yet the enchantment of the past is over them also. They are in that sacred land; their faces shine

with its hallowed light, their voices come to us with its moving tones.

Pope in replying to a letter of Swift's said, "You ask me if I have got a supply of new friends to make up for those who are gone? I think that impossible; for not our friends only, but so much of ourselves is gone by the mere flux and course of years, that, were the same friends restored to us, we could not be restored to ourselves to enjoy them."

In view of this power and attraction of the past, what do we mean by saying we would not live our lives over again? It seems to be an almost universal feeling. Cicero says, "If any god should grant me, that from this period of life I should become a child again and cry in the cradle, I should earnestly refuse it;" and Sir Thomas Browne says, "For my own part I would not live over my hours past, or begin again the thread of my days." Sir Thomas did not want to live his life over again, for fear he would live it worse instead of better. Cicero did not regret that he had lived, but intimates that he had had enough of this life, and wanted to enter upon that new and larger existence. "Oh, glorious day! when I shall depart to that divine company and assemblage of spirits, and quit this troubled and polluted scene!"

But probably the true reason was not given in either case. *We do not like to go back.* We are done with the past; we have dropped it, sloughed it off.

However pleasing it may be in the retrospect, however fondly we may dwell upon it, our real interest is in the present and the future. Probably no man regrets that he did not live at an earlier period, one hundred, five hundred, two thousand years ago; while the wish that our existence had been deferred to some future age is quite common. It all springs from this instinctive dislike to going back, and this zest for the unknown, the untried. There are many experiences in the lives of us all that we would like to repeat, but we do not want to go back. We habitually look upon life as a journey; the past is the road over which we have just come; these were fair countries we just passed through, delightful experiences we had at this point and at that, but we do not want to turn back and retrace our steps. There is more or less a feeling of satiety. We want to go ahead, but of what is behind us we have had our fill. What is the feeling we have when we meet a crowd pressing into the show as we are coming out, or when we see our eager friends embarking for Europe as we again set foot on our native shore? Do we not have a kind of pity for them? Do we not feel that we have taken the cream and that they will find only the skimmed milk? We think of the world as moving on, everybody and everything as pressing forward. To live our lives over again would be to go far to the rear. It would be to give up the present and all that it holds; it would be a kind of death.

Take from life all novelty, newness, surprise, hope, expectation, and what have you left? Nothing but a cold pancake, which even the dog hesitates over. One's life is full of routine and repetition, but then it is always a new day; it is always the latest time; we are on the crest of the foremost wave; we are perpetually entering a new and untried land. I am told that lecturers do not weary of repeating the same lecture over and over, because they always have a new audience. The routine of our lives is endurable because, as it were, we always have a new audience; this day is the last birth of time and its face no man has before seen. Life becomes stale to us when we cease to feel any interest in the new day, when the night does not re-create us, when we are not in some measure born afresh each morning. As age comes on we become less and less capable of renewal by rest and sleep, and so gradually life loses its relish, till it is liable to become a positive weariness.

Hence in saying we would not live our lives over, we are only emphasizing this reluctance we feel at going back, at taking up again what we have finished and laid down. Time translates itself in the mind as space; our earlier lives seem afar off, to be reached only by retracing our steps, and this we are not willing to do. In the only sense in which we can live our lives over, namely, in the lives of our children, we live them over again very gladly. We begin the game again with the old zest.

Who would not have his youth renewed? What old man would not have again, if he could, the vigor and elasticity of his prime? But we would not go back for them; we would have them here and now, and date the new lease from this moment. It argues no distaste for life, therefore, no deep dissatisfaction with it, to say we would not live our lives over again. We do live them over again from day to day, and from year to year; but the shadow of the past, we would not enter that. Why is it a shadow? Why this pathos of the days that are gone? Is it because, as Schopenhauer insists, life has more pain than pleasure? But it is all beautiful, the painful experiences as well as the pleasurable ones; it is all bathed in a light that never was on sea or land, and yet we see it as it were through a mist of tears. There is no pathos in the future, or in the present; but in the house of memory there are more sighs than laughter.

XVIII

THE SECRET OF HAPPINESS

ABOUT the pursuit of happiness, how often I say to myself, that considering life as a whole, the most one ought to expect is a kind of negative happiness, a neutral state, the absence of acute or positive unhappiness. Neutral tints make up the great background of nature, and why not of life? Neutral tints wear best in anything. We do not tire of them. How much even in the best books is of a negative or neutral character, — a background upon which the positive beauty is projected. A kind of tranquil, wholesome indifference, with now and then a dash of positive joy, is the best of the common lot. To be consciously and positively happy all the while, — how vain to expect it! We cannot walk through life on mountain peaks. Both laughter and tears we know, but a safe remove from both is the average felicity.

Another thought which often occurs to me is that we each have a certain capacity for happiness or unhappiness which is pretty constant. We are like lakes or ponds which have their level, and which as a rule are not permanently raised or lowered. As

things go in this world, each of us has about all the happiness he has the capacity for. We cannot be permanently set up or cast down. A healthful nature, in the vicissitudes of experience, is not made permanently unhappy, nor, on the other hand, is its water level permanently raised. Deplete us and we fill up; flood us and we quickly run down. We think that if a certain event were to come to pass, if some rare good fortune should befall us, our stock of happiness would be permanently increased, but the chances are that it would not; after a time we should settle back to the old everyday level. We should get used to the new conditions, the new prosperity, and find life wearing essentially the same tints as before. Our pond is fed from hidden springs; happiness is from within, and outward circumstances have but little power over it. The poor man thinks how happy he would be with the possessions of his rich neighbor, but it is one of the commonplace sayings of the preacher that he would not be. Wealth would not change his nature. His wants, his longings, would still run on as before. It would be high water with him for a season, but it could not last.

I have been told that, as a rule, the millionaires are the unhappiest of men. Restless, suspicious, sated, ennuied, they are like a sick man who can find no position in which he can rest. Our real and necessary wants are so few and so easily met, — food, clothes, shelter! If a little money will bring

us such comfort, what will not riches do? So we multiply our possessions many fold, hoping thereby to multiply our happiness. But it does not work, or works inversely. Do you suppose the millionaire's little girl has any more pleasure with her hundred-dollar doll than your washerwoman's child has with her rag baby? And what would not the millionaire himself give if he could eat his rich dinner with the relish the day laborer has in eating his!

The great depresser and destroyer of happiness is death; but from this blow, too, a healthful nature recovers. The broken and crushed plant rises again. The scar remains, but in the tissue beneath runs the same old blood.

It is undoubtedly true, however, that as time wears on, life becomes of a soberer hue. We are young but once, and need not wish to be young more than once. There is the happiness of youth, there is the happiness of manhood, there is the happiness of old age, — each period wearing a hue peculiar to itself. One of the illusions of life, however, which it is hard to shake off, is the fancying we were happier in the past than we are in the present. The past has such power to hallow and heighten effects! In the distance the course we have traveled looks smooth and inviting. The present moment is always the lowest point in the circle; it is that part of the wheel which touches the ground. Those days in the past that so haunt our memory and that seem invested with a

charm and a significance that is unknown to the present, — how shall we teach ourselves that it is all a trick of the imagination, the result of the medium through which they are seen, and that they, too, were once the present, and were as prosy and commonplace as the moment that now is?

It is equally a mistake to suppose we shall be happier to-morrow or next day than we are to-day. When the future comes it will then be the present, no longer a matter of imagination, but of actual experience This prosy, care-burdened self will be there, and the rainbow tints will still be in the distance.

The man who is hampered and constrained by the circumstances of his life, thinks his happiness would be greatly augmented by greater freedom, if he could go here or there, do this or that. But the chances are that such would not be the case. For instance, when I see a man going up and down the country looking for a place to settle, to build himself a home, and when I think of my own experience in that direction, I say, happy is the man whom circumstances take by the collar and set down without any choice on his part, in a particular place, and say to him, "There, abide there, and earn thy bread there." He is a free man then, paradoxical as it may seem, — free to make the most of his opportunities without regret. He is not the victim of his own whims or follies. He is not forever tormenting himself with

the notion that he has made a mistake, that if he had gone here or there, he would have been happier. Now he accepts the inevitable and makes the most of it. He goes to work with the more heart because he has no choice. He wastes no time in regrets, he makes no comparisons that disturb him, but devotes all his strength to getting all the satisfaction out of life that is possible.

If one were to make a choice of going on foot while other people had the privilege of wings, he would be haunted by the fear that he had made a mistake, and as he trudged along in the mire, doubtless would envy the people in the air above him; but if he had no choice in the matter and was compelled to go afoot through no fault of his, he would thank his stars that his fate was no worse. When choice comes in and we can elect this or that, then the door for regret, for unhappiness, is opened. We do not mourn because we were born in this place and not that, but if we had been consulted we might fancy some cause of regret.

Yet there is a condition or circumstance that has a greater bearing upon the happiness of life than any other. What is it? I have hardly hinted at it in the foregoing remarks. It is one of the simplest things in the world and within reach of all. If this secret were something I could put up at auction, what a throng of bidders I should have, and what high ones! People would come from all parts of the

earth to bid upon it. Only the wise ones can guess what it is. Some might say it is health, or money, or friends, or this or that possession, but you may have all these things and not be happy. You may have fame and power, and not be happy. I maintain there is one thing more necessary to a happy life than any other, though health and money and friends and home are all important. That one thing is — what? The sick man will say health; the poor man, wealth; the ambitious man, power; the scholar, knowledge; the overworked man, rest.

Without the one thing I have in mind, none of these things would long help their possessors to be happy. We could not long be happy without food or drink or clothes or shelter, but we may have all these things to perfection and still want the prime condition of happiness. It is often said that a contented mind is the first condition of happiness, but what is the first condition of a contented mind? You will be disappointed when I tell you what this all-important thing is, — it is so common, so near at hand, and so many people have so much of it and yet are not happy. They have too much of it, or else the kind that is not best suited to them. What is the best thing for a stream? It is to keep moving. If it stops, it stagnates. So the best thing for a man is that which keeps the currents going, — the physical, the moral, and the intellectual currents. Hence the secret of happiness is — something to do;

some congenial work. Take away the occupation of all men, and what a wretched world it would be! Half of it would commit suicide in less than ten days.

Few persons realize how much of their happiness, such as it is, is dependent upon their work, upon the fact that they are kept busy and not left to feed upon themselves. Happiness comes most to persons who seek her least, and think least about her. It is not an object to be sought; it is a state to be induced. It must follow and not lead. It must overtake you, and not you overtake it. How important is health to happiness, yet the best promoter of health is something to do.

Blessed is the man who has some congenial work, some occupation in which he can put his heart, and which affords a complete outlet to all the forces there are in him.

A man does not want much time to think about himself. Too much thought of the past and its shadows overwhelms; too much thought of the present dissipates; too much thought of the future unsettles. I find that if a horse stands too much in the stable, with too little work, he gets the crib-bite. Too little work makes a kind of windsucker of a man.

I recently had a letter from a friend who, from having rented his farm for a number of years, had had too much leisure. In this letter he writes how well and happy he has been during the season; he

has enjoyed existence, — the gods have smiled upon him and he has found life worth living. Then he told me, not by way of explanation, but as a matter of news, that his head man had been disabled two months before, and the care of the farm had devolved upon himself; more than that, he was renovating a place he had recently bought, remodeling the house, shaping the grounds, etc. Then I knew why he had been so unusually well and happy. He had had something to do into which he could throw himself, and it had set all the currents of his being going again.

About the same time I had a letter from another farmer friend who told me how busy he was, — so many things pressing that there was need of his going in two or more directions at once, not to get rich, but to make both ends meet. And yet he was so happy! (Therefore he was so happy, say I.) Troubles and trials, he says, are few and soon over with, while the pleasures are past all enumeration. "There is so much to be enjoyed, one never gets to the end of it."

This man was too busy to be unhappy; he had no time for ennui or the blues. You see he did not overindulge in the luxury of leisure. He was compelled to take it sparingly, hence it always tasted good to him. The fruit of the tree of life of which we must eat very sparingly is leisure. Too much of it, and it turns to gall on our tongue. A little

too much of those things which we think will make us happy, and we are cloyed, and miserable indeed. The boy would like to dine entirely upon pie or sweetmeats, and we all need the lesson that the dessert of life is to be taken sparingly. Because money is good, do not, therefore, think that riches are an unmixed blessing; because leisure is sweet to you, do not, therefore, imagine you would be happy with nothing to do. My correspondent was too busy and too poor to be cloyed or sated, too much the victim of circumstances to be self-accusing and repining. He had no choice but to go on and make the most of things.

I overheard an old man and a young man talking at the station. The young man was telling of an old uncle of his who had sold his farm and retired to the village. He had enjoyed going to the village, so now he thought he would take his fill of it. But it soon cloyed upon him. He had nothing to do. Every night he would say with a sigh of relief, "Well, another day is through," and each morning wondered how he could endure the day.

In every village up and down the older parts of the country there are several such men; every day is a burden to them because they have nothing to do. They drift aimlessly up and down the street; they loiter in the post-office or lounge in the grocery store or hotel bar-room, — no comfort to themselves and no use to the world. With what longing they

must look upon the farmers that drive in to get a horse shod or to do a little trading and then drive briskly away! How the vision of the farm, the cattle, the sheep, the barn, the growing crops, the early morning, the sowing, the planting, the harvesting must haunt them! Nothing to do! When they were driven and oppressed with work they had thought, What pleasure to be free from all this, to be at liberty to go and come as one likes, with no cows to milk or chores to do! Now they probably have not a hen or a dog to comfort them. These men do not live out more than half their latter days. Nature has no use for them, and they soon drop away; whereas their neighbors who stick to the farm and keep the currents going, reach a much more advanced period of life.

Rust and rot and mildew come to unused things. An empty and deserted house, how quickly it goes to decay! and an unoccupied man, how is his guard down on every side! When the will relaxes or is not stimulated, the physical powers relax also and their power to ward off disease is greatly lessened. Among men of all kinds who have retired from active life the mortality should be and doubtless is much greater than among men of the same age who stick to their lifelong occupations. Here is a farmer just died at eighty-eight who managed his farm till within a few months of his death; here is his neighbor, ten years younger, who retired to the village

several years ago, now wandering about more than half demented.

Oh, the blessedness of work, of life-giving and life-sustaining work! The busy man is the happy man; the idle man is the unhappy. When you feel blue and empty and disconsolate, and life seems hardly worth living, go to work with your hands, — delve, hoe, chop, saw, churn, thrash, anything to quicken the pulse and dispel the fumes. The blue devils can be hoed under in less than half an hour; ennui cannot stand the bucksaw fifteen minutes; the whole outlook may be brightened in a brief time by turning your hands to something you can do with a will.

I speak from experience. A few years ago I found my life beginning to stagnate; I discovered that I was losing my interest in things. I was out of sorts both physically and mentally; sleep was poor, digestion was poor, and my days began to wear too sombre a tinge. There was no good reason for it that I could perceive except that I was not well and fully occupied. I had too much leisure.

What was to be done? Go to work. Get more land and become a farmer in earnest. Exchange the penholder for the crowbar and the hoe-handle. I already had a few acres of land and had been a fruitgrower in a small way; why should I not double my possessions and plant a vineyard that promised some returns? So I began to cast covetous eyes upon some land adjoining me that was for sale. I nibbled

at it very shyly at first. I walked over it time after time and began to note its good points. Then I began to pace it off. I found pleasure and occupation even in this. Then I took a line and began to measure it. I measured off a pretty good slice and fancied it already my own. This tasted so good to me that I measured off a larger slice and then a still larger, till I found that nothing short of the whole field would satisfy me; I must go to the fence and take a clean strip one field broad from the road to the river.

This I did, thus doubling the nine acres I already possessed. It was winter; I could hardly wait till spring to commence operations upon the new purchase. Already I felt the tonic effect of those nine acres. They were a stimulus, an invitation, and a challenge. To subdue them and lick them into shape and plant them with choice grapes and currants and raspberries, — the mere thought of it toned me up and improved my sleep.

Before the snow was all off the ground in March we set to work underdraining the moist and springy places. My health and spirits improved daily. I seemed to be underdraining my own life and carrying off the stagnant water, as well as that of the land. Then a lot of ash stumps and brush, an old apple orchard, and a great many rocks and large stones were to be removed before the plough could be set going.

With what delight I saw this work go forward, and I bore my own part in it! I had not seen such electric April days for years; I had not sat down to dinner with such relish and satisfaction for the past decade; I had not seen the morning break with such anticipations since I was a boy. The clear, bright April days, the great river dimpling and shining there, the arriving birds, the robins laughing, the high-holes calling, the fox sparrows whistling, the blackbirds gurgling, and the hillside slope where we were at work, — what delight I had in it all, and what renewal of life it brought me! I found the best way to see the spring come was to be in the field at work. You are then in your proper place, and the genial influences steal in upon you and envelop you unawares. You glance up from your work, and the landscape is suddenly brimming with beauty. There is more joy and meaning in the voices of the birds than you ever before noticed. You do not have time to exhaust the prospect or to become sated with Nature, but feel her constantly as a stimulating presence. Out of the corners of your eyes and by a kind of indirection you see the subtle and renewing spirits of the season at work.

Before April was ended, the plough had done its perfect work, and in early May the vines and plants were set. Then followed the care and cultivation of them during the summer, and the pruning and training of them the subsequent season, all of

which has been a delight to me. Indeed the new vineyard has become almost a part of myself. I walk through it with the most intimate and personal regard for every vine. I know how they came there. I owe them a debt of gratitude. They have done more for me than a trip to Europe or to California could have done. If it brings me no other returns, the new lot already has proved one of the best investments I ever made in my life.

Oh, the blessedness of motion, of a spur to action, of a current in one's days, of something to stimulate the will, to help reach a decision, to carry down stream the waste and débris of one's life! Hardly a life anywhere so befouled or stagnant, but it would clear and renew itself, if the currents were set going by the proper kind and amount of honest work!

WHITMAN

A STUDY

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"All original art is self-regulated, and no original art can be regulated from without; it carries its own counterpoise, and does not receive it from elsewhere." — TAINE.

"If you want to tell good Gothic, see if it has the sort of roughness and largeness and nonchalance, mixed in places with the exquisite tenderness which seems always to be the sign manual of the broad vision and massy power of men who can see past *the work they are doing, and betray here and there something like disdain for it."* — RUSKIN.

"Formerly, during the period termed classic, when literature was governed by recognized rules, he was considered the best poet who had composed the most perfect work, the most beautiful poem, the most intelligible, the most agreeable to read, the most complete in every respect, — the Æneid, the Gerusalemme, a fine tragedy. To-day something else is wanted. For us the greatest poet is he who in his works most stimulates the reader's imagination and reflection, who excites him the most himself to poetize. The greatest poet is not he who has done the best, it is he who suggests the most; he, not all of whose meaning is at first obvious, and who leaves you much to desire, to explain, to study, much to complete in your turn." — SAINTE-BEUVE.

WHITMAN

WHITMAN

PRELIMINARY

I

THE writing of this preliminary chapter, and the final survey and revision of my Whitman essay, I am making at a rustic house I have built at a wild place a mile or more from my home upon the river. I call this place Whitman Land, because in many ways it is typical of my poet, — an amphitheatre of precipitous rock, slightly veiled with a delicate growth of verdure, inclosing a few acres of prairie-like land, once the site of an ancient lake, now a garden of unknown depth and fertility. Elemental ruggedness, savageness, and grandeur, combined with wonderful tenderness, modernness, and geniality. There rise the gray scarred cliffs, crowned here and there with a dead hemlock or pine, where, morning after morning, I have seen the bald eagle perch, and here at their feet this level area of tender humus, with three perennial springs of delicious cold water flowing in its margin ; a huge granite bowl filled with the elements and potencies of life. The scene has a strange fascination for me, and holds me here

day after day. From the highest point of rocks I can overlook a long stretch of the river and of the farming country beyond; I can hear owls hoot, hawks scream, and roosters crow. Birds of the garden and orchard meet birds of the forest upon the shaggy cedar posts that uphold my porch. At dusk the call of the whip-poor-will mingles with the chorus of the pickerel frogs, and in the morning I hear through the robins' cheerful burst the sombre plaint of the mourning-dove. When I tire of my manuscript, I walk in the woods, or climb the rocks, or help the men clear up the ground, piling and burning the stumps and rubbish. This scene and situation, so primitive and secluded, yet so touched with and adapted to civilization, responding to the moods of both sides of the life and imagination of a modern man, seems, I repeat, typical in many ways of my poet, and is a veritable Whitman land. Whitman does not to me suggest the wild and unkempt as he seems to do to many; he suggests the cosmic and the elemental, and this is one of the dominant thoughts that run through my dissertation. Scenes of power and savagery in nature were more welcome to him, probably more stimulating to him, than the scenes of the pretty and placid, and he cherished the hope that he had put into his "Leaves" some of the tonic and fortifying quality of Nature in her more grand and primitive aspects.

His wildness is only the wildness of the great

primary forces from which we draw our health and strength. Underneath all his unloosedness, or free launching forth of himself, is the sanity and repose of nature.

II

I first became acquainted with Whitman's poetry through the columns of the old "Saturday Press" when I was twenty or twenty-one years old (1858 or 1859). The first things I remember to have read were "There was a child went forth," "This Compost," "As I ebb'd with the Ocean of Life," "Old Ireland," and maybe a few others. I was attracted by the new poet's work from the first. It seemed to let me into a larger, freer air than I found in the current poetry. Meeting Bayard Taylor about this time, I spoke to him about Whitman. "Yes," he said, "there is something in him, but he is a man of colossal egotism."

A few years later a friend sent me a copy of the Thayer & Eldridge edition of "Leaves of Grass" of 1860. It proved a fascinating but puzzling book to me. I grazed upon it like a colt upon a mountain, taking what tasted good to me, and avoiding what displeased me, but having little or no conception of the purport of the work as a whole. I found passages and whole poems here and there that I never tired of reading, and that gave a strange fillip to my moral and intellectual nature, but nearly as many passages and poems puzzled or repelled me.

My absorption of Emerson had prepared me in a measure for Whitman's philosophy of life, but not for the ideals of character and conduct which he held up to me, nor for the standards in art to which the poet perpetually appealed. Whitman was Emerson translated from the abstract into the concrete. There was no privacy with Whitman; he never sat me down in a corner with a cozy, comfortable shut-in feeling, but he set me upon a hill or started me upon an endless journey. Wordsworth had been my poet of nature, of the sequestered and the idyllic; but I saw that here was a poet of a larger, more fundamental nature, indeed of the Cosmos itself. Not a poet of dells and fells, but of the earth and the orbs. This much soon appeared to me, but I was troubled by the poet's apparent "colossal egotism," by his attitude toward evil, declaring himself "to be the poet of wickedness also;" by his seeming attraction toward the turbulent and the disorderly; and, at times, by what the critics had called his cataloguing style of treatment.

When I came to meet the poet himself, which was in the fall of 1863, I felt less concern about these features of his work; he was so sound and sweet and gentle and attractive as a man, and withal so wise and tolerant, that I soon came to feel the same confidence in the book that I at once placed in its author, even in the parts which I did not understand. I saw that the work and the man

were one, and that the former must be good as the latter was good. There was something in the manner in which both the book and its author carried themselves under the sun, and in the way they confronted America and the present time, that convinced beyond the power of logic or criticism.

The more I saw of Whitman, and the more I studied his "Leaves," the more significance I found in both, and the clearer it became to me that a new type of a man and a new departure in poetic literature were here foreshadowed. There was something forbidding, but there was something vital and grand back of it. I found to be true what the poet said of himself, —

"Bearded, sunburnt, gray-neck'd, forbidding, I have arrived,
To be wrestled with as I pass for the solid prizes of the universe,
For such I afford whoever can persevere to win them."

I have persevered in my study of the poet, though balked many times, and the effect upon my own mental and spiritual nature has been great; no such "solid prizes" in the way of a broader outlook upon life and nature, and, I may say, upon art, has any poet of my time afforded me. There are passages or whole poems in the "Leaves" which I do not yet understand ("Sleep-Chasings" is one of them), though the language is as clear as daylight; they

are simply too subtle or elusive for me; but my confidence in the logical soundness of the book is so complete that I do not trouble myself at all about these things.

III

I would fain make these introductory remarks to my essay a sort of window through which the reader may get a fairly good view of what lies beyond. If he does not here get any glimpse or suggestion of what pleases him, or of what he is looking for, it will hardly be worth while for him to trouble himself further.

A great many readers, perhaps three fourths of the readers of current poetry, and not a few of the writers thereof, cannot stand Whitman at all, or see any reason for his being. To such my essay, if it ever comes to their notice, will be a curiosity, maybe an offense. But I trust it will meet with a different reception at the hands of the smaller but rapidly growing circle of those who are beginning to turn to Whitman as the most imposing and significant figure in our literary annals.

The rapidly growing Whitman literature attests the increasing interest to which I refer. Indeed, it seems likely that by the end of the century the literature which will have grown up around the name of this man will surpass in bulk and value that which has grown up around the name of any other man of letters born within the century.

When Mr. Stedman wrote his essay upon the poet early in the eighties, he referred to the mass of this literature. It has probably more than doubled in volume in the intervening years: since Whitman's death in the spring of '92, it has been added to by William Clark's book upon the poet, Professor Trigg's study of Browning and Whitman, and the work of that accomplished critic and scholar, so lately gone to his rest, John Addington Symonds. This last is undoubtedly the most notable contribution that has yet been made, or is likely very soon to be made, to the Whitman literature. Mr. Symonds declares that "Leaves of Grass," which he first read at the age of twenty-five, influenced him more than any other book has done, except the Bible, — more than Plato, more than Goethe.

When we remember that the man who made this statement was eminently a man of books, deeply read in all literatures, his testimony may well offset that of a score of our home critics who find nothing worthy or helpful in Whitman's work. One positive witness in such a matter outweighs any number of negative ones.

IV

For making another addition to the growing Whitman literature, I have no apology to offer. I know well enough that "writing and talk" cannot

"prove" a poet; that he must be his own proof or be forgotten; and my main purpose in writing about Whitman, as in writing about nature, is to tell readers what I have found there, with the hope of inducing them to look for themselves. At the same time, I may say that I think no modern poet so much needs to be surrounded by an atmosphere of comment and interpretation, through which readers may approach him, as does Whitman. His work sprang from a habit or attitude of mind quite foreign to that with which current literature makes us familiar, — so germinal is it, and so little is it beholden to the formal art we so assiduously cultivate. The poet says his work "connects lovingly with precedents," but it does not connect lovingly with any body of poetry of this century. "Leaves of Grass" is bound to be a shock to the timid and pampered taste of the majority of current readers. I would fain lessen this shock by interposing my own pages of comment between the book and the public. The critic can say so many things the poet cannot. He can explain and qualify and analyze, whereas the creative artist can only hint or project. The poet must hasten on, he must infold and bind together, he must be direct and synthetic in every act. Reflection and qualification are not for him, but action, emotion, volition, the procreant blending and surrender. He works as Nature does, and gives us reality in every line.

PRELIMINARY

Whitman says: —

"I charge you forever reject those who would expound me, for I cannot expound myself."

The type of mind of Whitman's, which seldom or never emerges as a mere mentality, an independent thinking and knowing faculty, but always as a personality, always as a complete human entity, never can expound itself, because its operations are synthetic and not analytic, its mainspring is love and not mere knowledge. In his prose essay called "A Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads," appended to the final edition of his poems, Whitman has not so much sought to expound himself as to put his reader in possession of his point of view, and of the considerations that lie back of his work, This chapter might render much that I have written superfluous, were there not always a distinct gain in seeing an author through another medium, or in getting the equivalents of him in the thoughts and ideals of a kindred and sympathetic mind. But I have not consciously sought to expound Whitman, any more than in my other books I have sought to expound the birds or wild nature. I have written out some things that he means to me, and the pleasure and profit I have found in his pages.

There is no end to what can be drawn out of him. It has been said and repeated that he was not a thinker, and yet I find more food for thought in

him than in all other poets. It has been often said and repeated that he is not a poet, and yet the readers that respond to him the most fully appear to be those in whom the poetic temperament is paramount. I believe he supplies in fuller measure that pristine element, something akin to the unbreathed air of mountain and shore, which makes the arterial blood of poetry and literature, than any other modern writer.

V

We can make little of Whitman unless we allow him to be a law unto himself, and seek him through the clews which he himself brings. When we try him by current modes, current taste, and demand of him formal beauty, formal art, we are disappointed. But when we try him by what we may call the scientific standard, the standard of organic nature, and demand of him the vital and the characteristic, — demand of him that he have a law of his own, and fulfill that law in the poetic sphere, — the result is quite different.

More than any other poet, Whitman is what we make him; more than any other poet, his greatest value is in what he suggests and implies, rather than in what he portrays; and more than any other poet must he wait to be understood by the growth of the taste of himself. "I make the only growth by which I can be appreciated," he truly says.

His words are like the manna that descended

upon the Israelites, "in which were all manner of tastes; and every one found in it what his palate was chiefly pleased with. If he desired fat in it, he had it. In it the young men tasted bread; the old men honey; and the children oil." Many young men, — poets, artists, teachers, preachers, — have testified that they have found bread in Whitman, the veritable bread of life; others have found honey, sweet poetic morsels; and not a few report having found only gall.

VI

In considering an original work like "Leaves of Grass," the search is always for the grounds upon which it is to be justified and explained. These grounds in this work are not easy to find; they lie deeper than the grounds upon which the popular poets rest. Because they are not at once seen, many readers have denied that there are any such grounds. But to deny a basis of reality to a work with the history of "Leaves of Grass," and a basis well grounded on æsthetic and artistic principles, is not to be thought of.

The more the poet eludes us, the more we know he has his hiding-place somewhere. The more he denies our standards, the more we know he has standards of his own which we must discover; the more he flouts at our literary conventions, the more we must press him for his own principles and

methods. How does he justify himself to himself? Could any sane man have written the Children of Adam poems who was not sustained by deepest moral and æsthetic convictions? It is the business of the critic to search for these principles and convictions, and not shirk the task by ridicule and denial.

VII

If there was never any change in taste, if it always ran in the same channels, — indeed, if it did not at times run in precisely opposite channels, — there would be little hope that Walt Whitman's poetry would ever find any considerable number of readers. But one of the laws that dominate the progress of literature, as Edmond Schérer says, is incessant change, not only in thought and ideas, but in taste and the starting-points of art. A radical and almost violent change in these respects is indicated by Whitman, — a change which is in unison with many things in modern life and morals, but which fairly crosses the prevailing taste in poetry and in art. No such dose of realism and individualism under the guise of poetry has been administered to the reading public in this century. No such break with literary traditions — no such audacious attempt to tally, in a printed page, the living concrete man, an actual human presence, instead of the conscious, made-up poet — is to be found in modern literary records.

VIII

The much that I have said in the following pages about Whitman's radical differences from other poets — his changed attitude toward the universe, his unwonted methods and aims — might seem to place him upon a ground so unique and individual as to contradict my claims for his breadth and universality. The great poets stand upon common ground; they excel along familiar lines, they touch us, and touch us deeply, at many points. What always saves Whitman is his enormous endowment of what is "commonest, nearest, easiest," — his atmosphere of the common day, the common life, and his fund of human sympathy and love. He is strange because he gives us the familiar in such a direct, unexpected manner. His "Leaves" are like some new fruit that we have never before tasted. It is the product of another clime, another hemisphere. The same old rains and dews, the same old sun and soil, nursed it, yet in so many ways how novel and strange! We certainly have to serve a certain apprenticeship to this poet, familiarize ourselves with his point of view and with his democratic spirit, before we can make much of him. The spirit in which we come to him from the other poets — the poets of art and culture — is for the most part unfriendly to him. There is something rude, strange, and unpoetic about him at first sight that is sure to give most

readers of poetry a shock. I think one might come to him from the Greek poets, or the old Hebrew or Oriental bards, with less shock than from our modern delicate and refined singers; because the old poets were more simple and elemental, and aimed less at the distilled dainties of poetry, than the modern. They were full of action, too, and volition, — of that which begets and sustains life. Whitman's poetry is almost entirely the expression of will and personality, and runs very little to intellectual subtleties and refinements. It fulfills itself in our wills and characters, rather than in our taste.

IX

Whitman will always be a strange and unwonted figure among his country's poets, and among English poets generally, — a cropping out again, after so many centuries, of the old bardic prophetic strain. Had he dropped upon us from some other sphere, he could hardly have been a greater surprise and puzzle to the average reader or critic. Into a literature that was timid, imitative, conventional, he fell like leviathan into a duck-pond, and the commotion and consternation he created there have not yet subsided. All the reigning poets in this country except Emerson denied him, and many of our minor poets still keep up a hostile sissing and cackling. He will probably always be more or less a stumbling-block to the minor poet, because of his

indifference to the things which to the minor poet are all in all. He was a poet without what is called artistic form, and without technique, as that word is commonly understood. His method was analogous to the dynamic method of organic nature, rather than to the mechanical or constructive method of the popular poets.

X

Of course the first thing that strikes the reader in "Leaves of Grass" is its seeming oddity and strangeness. If a man were to come into a dress reception in shirt-sleeves and with his hat on, the feature would strike us at once, and would be magnified in our eyes; we should quite forget that he was a man, and in essentials differed but little from the rest of us, after all. The exterior habiliments on such occasions count for nearly everything; and in the popular poetry rhyme, measure, and the language and manners of the poets are much more than anything else. If Whitman did not do anything so outré as to come into a dress reception with his coat off and his hat on, he did come into the circle of the poets without the usual poetic habiliments. He was not dressed up at all, and he was not at all abashed or apologetic. His air was confident and self-satisfied, if it did not at times suggest the insolent and aggressive. It was the dress circle that was on trial, and not Walt Whitman.

We could forgive a man in real life for such an audacious proceeding only on the ground of his being something extraordinary as a person, with an extraordinary message to convey; and we can pardon the poet only on precisely like grounds. He must make us forget his unwonted garb by his unique and lovable personality, and the power and wisdom of his utterance. If he cannot do this, we shall soon tire of him.

That Whitman was a personality the like of which the world has not often seen, and that his message to his country and to his race was of prime importance, are conclusions at which more and more thinking persons are surely arriving.

His want of art, of which we have heard so much, is, it seems to me, just this want of the usual trappings and dress uniform of the poets. In the essentials of art, the creative imagination, the plastic and quickening spirit, the power of identification with the thing contemplated, and the absolute use of words, he has few rivals.

XI

I make no claim that my essay is a dispassionate, disinterested view of Whitman. It will doubtless appear to many as a one-sided view, or as colored by my love for the man himself. And I shall not be disturbed if such turns out to be the case. A dispassionate view of a man like Whitman is prob-

ably out of the question in our time, or in any near time. His appeal is so personal and direct that readers are apt to be either violently for him or violently against, and it will require the perspective of more than one generation to bring out his true significance. Still, for any partiality for its subject which my book may show, let me take shelter behind a dictum of Goethe.

"I am more and more convinced," says the great critic, "that whenever one has to vent an opinion on the actions or on the writings of others, unless this be done from a certain one-sided enthusiasm, or from a loving interest in the person and the work, the result is hardly worth gathering up. Sympathy and enjoyment in what we see is in fact the only reality, and, from such reality, reality as a natural product follows. All else is vanity."

To a loving interest in Whitman and his work, which may indeed amount to one-sided enthusiasm, I plead guilty. This at least is real with me, and not affected; and, if the reality which Goethe predicts in such cases only follows, I shall be more than content.

XII

In the world of literature, as in the world of physical forces, things adjust themselves after a while, and no impetus can be given to any man's name or fame that will finally carry it beyond the

limit of his real worth. However "one-sided" my enthusiasm for Whitman may be, or that of any of his friends may be, there is no danger but that in time he will find exactly his proper place and level. My opinion, or any man's opinion, of the works of another, is like a wind that blows for a moment across the water, heaping it up a little on the shore or else beating it down, but not in any way permanently affecting its proper level.

The adverse winds that have blown over Whitman's work have been many and persistent, and yet the tide has surely risen, his fame has slowly increased.

It will soon be forty years since he issued the first thin quarto edition of "Leaves of Grass," and, though the opposition to him has been the most fierce and determined ever recorded in our literary history, often degenerating into persecution and willful misrepresentation, yet his fame has steadily grown both at home and abroad. The impression he early made upon such men as Emerson, Thoreau, William O'Connor, Mr. Stedman, Colonel Ingersoll, and others in this country, and upon Professors Dowden and Clifford, upon Symonds, Ruskin, Tennyson, Rossetti, Lord Lytton, Mrs. Gilchrist, George Eliot, in England, has been followed by an equally deep or deeper impression upon many of the younger and bolder spirits of both hemispheres. In fact, Whitman saw his battle essentially won in his own

lifetime, though his complete triumph is of course a matter of the distant future.

XIII

But let me give without further delay a fuller hint of the attitude these pages assume and hold toward the subject they discuss.

There are always, or nearly always, a few men born to each generation who embody the best thought and culture of that generation, and express it in approved literary forms. From Petrarch down to Lowell, the lives and works of these men fill the literary annals; they uphold the literary and scholarly traditions; they are the true men of letters; they are justly honored and beloved in their day and land. We in this country have recently, in the death of Dr. Holmes, mourned the loss of the last of the New England band of such men. We are all indebted to them for solace, and for moral and intellectual stimulus.

Then, much more rarely, there are born to a race or people men who are like an irruption of life from another world, who belong to another order, who bring other standards, and sow the seed of new and larger types; who are not the organs of the culture or modes of their time, and whom their times for the most part decry and disown, — the primal, original, elemental men. It is here, in my opinion, that we must place Whitman; not among the

minstrels and edifiers of his age, but among its prophets and saviours. He is nearer the sources of things than the popular poets, — nearer the founders and discoverers, closer akin to the large, fervent, prophetic, patriarchal men who figure in the early heroic ages. His work ranks with the great primitive books. He is of the type of the skald, the bard, the seer, the prophet. The specialization and differentiation of our latter ages of science and culture are less marked in him than in other poets. Poetry, philosophy, religion, are all inseparably blended in his pages. He is in many ways a reversion to an earlier type. Dr. Brinton has remarked that his attitude toward the principle of sex and his use of sexual imagery in his poems are the same as in the more primitive religions. Whitman was not a poet by elaboration, but by suggestion ; not an artist by formal presentation, but by spirit and conception; not a philosopher by system and afterthought, but by vision and temper.

In his "Leaves," we again hear the note of destiny, — again see the universal laws and forces exemplified in the human personality, and turned upon life with love and triumph.

XIV

The world always has trouble with its primary men, or with the men who have any primary gifts, like Emerson, Wordsworth, Browning, Tolstoi, Ib-

sen. The idols of an age are nearly always secondary men: they break no new ground; they make no extraordinary demands; our tastes and wants are already adjusted to their type; we understand and approve of them at once. The primary men disturb us; they are a summons and a challenge; they break up the old order; they open up new territory which we are to subdue and occupy; the next age and the next make more of them. In my opinion, the next age and the next will make more of Whitman, and the next still more, because he is in the great world-current, in the line of the evolutionary movement of our time. Is it at all probable that Tennyson can ever be to any other age what he has been to this? Tennyson marks an expiring age, the sunset of the feudal world. He did not share the spirit to which the future belongs. There was not one drop of democratic blood in his veins. To him, the people were an hundred-headed beast.

XV

If my essay seems like one continual strain to attain the unattainable, to compass and define Whitman, who will not be compassed and defined, I can only say that I regret it, but could not well help it. Talking about Whitman, Symonds said, was like talking about the universe, and it is so. There is somewhat incommensurable in his works. One may not hope to speak the final word about him, to sum

him up in a sentence. He is so palpable, so real, so near at hand, that the critic or expounder of him promises himself an easy victory; but before one can close with him he is gone. He is, after all, as subtle and baffling as the air or light.

> . . . "I will certainly elude you,
> Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold!
> Already you see I have escaped from you."

It is probably this characteristic which makes Whitman an irrepressible figure in literature; he will not down for friend or foe. He escapes from all classification, and is larger than any definition of him that has yet been given. How many times has he been exploded by British and American critics; how many times has he been labeled and put upon the shelf, only to reappear again as vigorous and untranslatable as ever!

XVI

So far as Whitman stands merely for the spirit of revolt, or of reaction against current modes in life and literature, I have little interest in him. As the "apostle of the rough, the uncouth," to use Mr. Howells's words, the world would long ago have tired of him. The irruption into letters of the wild and lawless, or of the strained and eccentric, can amuse and interest us only for a moment.

It is because these are only momentary phases of him, as it were, and because underneath all he embraces the whole of life and ministers to it, that his fame and influence are still growing in the world. One hesitates even to call Whitman the poet of "democracy," or of "personality," or of "the modern," because such terms only half define him. He quickly escapes into that large and universal air which all great art breathes. We cannot sum him up in a phrase. He flows out on all sides, and his sympathies embrace all types and conditions of men. He is a great democrat, but, first and last and over all, he is a great man, a great nature, and deep world-currents course through him. He is distinctively an American poet, but his Americanism is only the door through which he enters upon the universal.

XVII

Call his work poetry or prose, or what you will: that it is an inspired utterance of some sort, any competent person ought to be able to see. And what else do we finally demand of any work than that it be inspired? How all questions of form and art, and all other questions, sink into insignificance beside that! The exaltation of mind and spirit shown in the main body of Whitman's work, the genuine, prophetic fervor, the intensification and amplification of the simple ego, and the resultant

raising of all human values, seem to me as plain as daylight.

Whitman is to be classed among the great names by the breadth and all-inclusiveness of his theme and by his irrepressible personality. I think it highly probable that future scholars and critics will find his work fully as significant and era-marking as that of any of the few supreme names of the past. It is the culmination of an age of individualism, and, as opposites meet, it is also the best lesson in nationalism and universal charity that this century has seen.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND PERSONAL

I

WALT WHITMAN was born at West Hills, Long Island, May 30, 1819, and died at Camden, N. J., March 26, 1892. Though born in the country, most of his life was passed in cities; first in Brooklyn and New York, then in New Orleans, then in Washington, and lastly in Camden, where his body is buried. It was a poet's life from first to last, — free, unhampered, unworldly, unconventional, picturesque, simple, untouched by the craze of money-getting, unselfish, devoted to others, and was, on the whole, joyfully and contentedly lived. It was a pleased and interested saunter through the world, — no hurry, no fever, no strife; hence no bitterness, no depletion, no wasted energies. A farm boy, then a school-teacher, then a printer, editor, writer, traveler, mechanic, nurse in the army hospitals, and lastly government clerk; large and picturesque of figure, slow of movement; tolerant, passive, receptive, and democratic, — of the people; in all his tastes and attractions, always aiming to walk abreast with the great laws and forces, and to live thoroughly in the free, nonchalant

spirit of his own day and land. His strain was mingled Dutch and English, with a decided Quaker tinge, which came from his mother's side, and which had a marked influence upon his work.

The spirit that led him to devote his time and substance to the sick and wounded soldiers during the war may be seen in that earlier incident in his life when he drove a Broadway stage all one winter, that a disabled driver might lie by without starving his family. It is from this episode that the tradition of his having been a New York stage-driver comes. He seems always to have had a special liking for this class of workmen. One of the house surgeons of the old New York Hospital relates that in the latter part of the fifties Whitman was a frequent visitor at that institution, looking after and ministering to disabled stage-drivers. "These drivers," says the doctor, "like those of the omnibuses in London, were a set of men by themselves. A good deal of strength, intelligence, and skillful management of horses was required of a Broadway stage-driver. He seems to have been decidedly a higher order of man than the driver of the present horse-cars. He usually had his primary education in the country, and graduated as a thorough expert in managing a very difficult machine, in an exceptionally busy thoroughfare.

"It was this kind of a man that so attracted Walt Whitman that he was constantly to be seen perched

on the box alongside one of them going up and down Broadway. I often watched the poet and driver, as probably did many another New Yorker in those days.

"I do not wonder as much now as I did in 1860 that a man like Walt Whitman became interested in these drivers. He was not interested in the news of every-day life, — the murders and accidents and political convulsions, — but he was interested in strong types of human character. We young men had not had experience enough to understand this kind of a man. It seems to me now that we looked at Whitman simply as a kind of crank, if the word had then been invented. His talk to us was chiefly of books, and the men who wrote them: especially of poetry, and what he considered poetry. He never said much of the class whom he visited in our wards, after he had satisfied himself of the nature of the injury and of the prospect of recovery.

"Whitman appeared to be about forty years of age at that time. He was always dressed in a blue flannel coat and vest, with gray and baggy trousers. He wore a woolen shirt, with a Byronic collar, low in the neck, without a cravat, as I remember, and a large felt hat. His hair was iron gray, and he had a full beard and mustache of the same color. His face and neck were bronzed by exposure to the sun and air. He was large, and gave the impression of being a vigorous man. He was scru-

pulously careful of his simple attire, and his hands were soft and hairy."

During the early inception of "Leaves of Grass" he was a carpenter in Brooklyn, building and selling small frame-houses to working people. He frequently knocked off work to write his poems. In his life Whitman was never one of the restless, striving sort. In this respect he was not typical of his countrymen. All his urgency and strenuousness he reserved for his book. He seems always to have been a sort of visitor in life, noting, observing, absorbing, keeping aloof from all ties that would hold him, and making the most of the hour and the place in which he happened to be. He was in no sense a typical literary man. During his life in New York and Brooklyn, we see him moving entirely outside the fashionable circles, the learned circles, the literary circles, the money-getting circles. He belongs to no set or club. He is seen more with the laboring classes, — drivers, boatmen, mechanics, printers, — and I suspect may often be found with publicans and sinners. He is fond of the ferries and of the omnibuses. He is a frequenter of the theatre and of the Italian opera. Alboni makes a deep and lasting impression upon him. It is probably to her that he writes these lines: —

"Here take this gift,
I was reserving it for some hero, speaker, general,

One who should serve the good old cause, the great idea,
the progress and freedom of the race,
Some brave confronter of despots, some daring rebel;
But I see that what I was reserving belongs to you just as
much as to any."

Elsewhere he refers to Alboni by name and speaks of her as

"The lustrous orb, Venus contralto, the blooming mother,
Sister of loftiest gods."

Some of his poems were written at the opera. The great singers evidently gave him clews and suggestions that were applicable to his own art.

His study was out of doors. He wrote on the street, on the ferry, at the seaside, in the fields, at the opera, — always from living impulses arising at the moment, and always with his eye upon the fact. He says he has read his "Leaves" to himself in the open air, and tried them by the realities of life and nature about him. Were they as real and alive as they? — this was the only question with him.

At home in his father's family in Brooklyn we see him gentle, patient, conciliatory, much looked up to by all. Neighbors seek his advice. He is cool, deliberate, impartial. A marked trait is his indifference to money matters; his people are often troubled because he lets opportunities to make money pass by. When his "Leaves" appear, his

family are puzzled, do not know what to make of it. His mother thinks that, if "Hiawatha" is poetry, maybe Walt's book is, too. He never counsels with any one, and is utterly indifferent as to what people may say or think. He is not a stirring and punctual man, is always a little late; not an early riser, not prompt at dinner; always has ample time, and will not be hurried; the business gods do not receive his homage. He is gray at thirty, and is said to have had a look of age in youth, as he had a look of youth in age. He has few books, cares little for sport, never uses a gun; has no bad habits; has no entanglements with women, and apparently never contemplates marriage. It is said that during his earliest years of manhood he kept quite aloof from the "girls."

At the age of nineteen he edited "The Long Islander," published at Huntington. A recent visitor to these early haunts of Whitman gathered some reminiscences of him at this date: —

"Amid the deep revery of nature, on that mild October afternoon, we returned to the village of Huntington, there to meet the few, the very few, survivors who recall Walt's first appearance in the literary world as the editor of 'The Long Islander,' nigh sixty years ago (1838). Two of these forefathers of the hamlet clearly remembered his powerful personality, brimful of life, reveling in strength, careless of time and the world, of money and of toil;

a lover of books and of jokes; delighting to gather round him the youth of the village in his printing-room of evenings, and tell them stories and read them poetry, his own and others'. That of his own he called his 'Yawps,' a word which he afterwards made famous. Both remembered him as a delightful companion, generous to a fault, glorying in youth, negligent of his affairs, issuing 'The Long Islander' at random intervals, — once a week, once in two weeks, once in three, — until its financial backers lost faith and hope and turned him out, and with him the whole office corps; for Walt himself was editor, publisher, compositor, pressman, and printer's devil, all in one."

II

Few men were so deeply impressed by our Civil War as was Whitman. It aroused all his patriotism, all his sympathies, and, as a poet, tested his power to deal with great contemporary events and scenes. He was first drawn to the seat of war on behalf of his brother, Lieutenant-Colonel George W. Whitman, 51st New York Volunteers, who was wounded by the fragment of a shell at Fredericksburg. This was in the fall of 1862. This brought him in contact with the sick and wounded soldiers, and henceforth, as long as the war lasted and longer, he devoted his time and substance to ministering to them. The first two or three years of his life in

Washington he supported himself by correspondence with Northern newspapers, mainly with the "New York Times." These letters, as well as the weekly letters to his mother during the same period, form an intensely pathetic and interesting record.

They contain such revelations of himself, and such pictures of the scenes he moved among, that I shall here quote freely from them. The following extract is from a letter written from Fredericksburg the third or fourth day after the battle of December, 1862: —

"Spent a good part of the day in a large brick mansion on the banks of the Rappahannock, immediately opposite Fredericksburg. It is used as a hospital since the battle, and seems to have received only the worst cases. Out of doors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, etc., about a load for a one-horse cart. Several dead bodies lie near, each covered with its brown woolen blanket. In the door-yard, toward the river, are fresh graves, mostly of officers, their names on pieces of barrel-staves, or broken board, stuck in the dirt. (Most of these bodies were subsequently taken up and transported North to their friends.)

"The house is quite crowded, everything impromptu, no system, all bad enough, but I have no doubt the best that can be done; all the wounds

pretty bad, some frightful, the men in their old clothes, unclean and bloody. Some of the wounded are rebel officers, prisoners. One, a Mississippian, — a captain, — hit badly in leg, I talked with some time; he asked me for papers, which I gave him. (I saw him three months afterward in Washington, with leg amputated, doing well.)

"I went through the rooms, down stairs and up. Some of the men were dying. I had nothing to give at that visit, but wrote a few letters to folks home, mothers, etc. Also talked to three or four who seemed most susceptible to it, and needing it."

"December 22 to 31. — Am among the regimental, brigade, and division hospitals somewhat. Few at home realize that these are merely tents, and sometimes very poor ones, the wounded lying on the ground, lucky if their blanket is spread on a layer of pine or hemlock twigs, or some leaves. No cots; seldom even a mattress on the ground. It is pretty cold. I go around from one case to another. I do not see that I can do any good, but I cannot leave them. Once in a while some youngster holds on to me convulsively, and I do what I can for him; at any rate, stop with him and sit near him for hours, if he wishes it.

"Besides the hospitals, I also go occasionally on long tours through the camps, talking with the men, etc.; sometimes at night among the groups around the fires, in their shebang enclosures of

bushes. I soon get acquainted anywhere in camp, with officers or men, and am always well used. Sometimes I go down on picket with the regiments I know best."

After continuing in front through the winter, he returns to Washington, where the wounded and sick have mainly been concentrated. The Capital city, truly, is now one huge hospital; and there Whitman establishes himself, and thenceforward, for several years, has but one daily and nightly avocation.

He alludes to writing letters by the bedside, and says: —

"I do a good deal of this, of course, writing all kinds, including love-letters. Many sick and wounded soldiers have not written home to parents, brothers, sisters, and even wives, for one reason or another, for a long, long time. Some are poor writers, some cannot get paper and envelopes; many have an aversion to writing, because they dread to worry the folks at home, — the facts about them are so sad to tell. I always encourage the men to write, and promptly write for them."

A glimpse of the scenes after Chancellorsville: —

"As I write this, in May, 1863, the wounded have begun to arrive from Hooker's command from bloody Chancellorsville. I was down among the first arrivals. The men in charge of them told me the bad cases were yet to come. If that is so, I

pity them, for these are bad enough. You ought to see the scene of the wounded arriving at the landing here foot of Sixth Street at night. Two boat-loads came about half past seven last night. A little after eight, it rained a long and violent shower. The poor, pale, helpless soldiers had been debarked, and lay around on the wharf and neighborhood anywhere. The rain was, probably, grateful to them; at any rate they were exposed to it.

"The few torches light up the spectacle. All around on the wharf, on the ground, out on side places, etc., the men are lying on blankets and old quilts, with the bloody rags bound round heads, arms, legs, etc. The attendants are few, and at night few outsiders also, — only a few hard-worked transportation men and drivers. (The wounded are getting to be common, and people grow callous.) The men, whatever their condition, lie there, and patiently wait till their turn comes to be taken up. Near by the ambulances are now arriving in clusters, and one after another is called to back up and take its load. Extreme cases are sent off on stretchers. The men generally make little or no ado, whatever their sufferings, — a few groans that cannot be repressed, and occasionally a scream of pain, as they lift a man into the ambulance.

"To-day, as I write, hundreds more are expected, and to-morrow and the next day more, and so on for many days.

"The soldiers are nearly all young men, and far more American than is generally supposed, — I should say nine tenths are native-born. Among the arrivals from Chancellorsville I find a large proportion of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois men. As usual, there are all sorts of wounds. Some of the men are fearfully burnt from the explosion of artillery caissons. One ward has a long row of officers, some with ugly hurts. Yesterday was, perhaps, worse than usual. Amputations are going on, — the attendants are dressing wounds. As you pass by, you must be on your guard where you look. I saw, the other day, a gentleman — a visitor, apparently, from curiosity — in one of the wards stop and turn a moment to look at an awful wound they were probing, etc. He turned pale, and in a moment more he had fainted away and fallen on the floor."

An episode, — the death of a New York soldier: —

"This afternoon, July 22, 1863, I spent a long time with a young man I have been with a good deal from time to time, named Oscar F. Wilber, company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhœa, and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and asked him what I should read. He said: 'Make your own choice.' I opened at the close of one of the first books of the Evangelists, and read

the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man asked me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, as Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He asked me if I enjoyed religion. I said: 'Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, maybe, it is the same thing.' He said: 'It is my chief reliance.' He talked of death, and said he did not fear it. I said: 'Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?' He said: 'I may, but it is not probable.' He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad; it discharged much. Then the diarrhœa had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he returned fourfold. He gave me his mother's address, Mrs. Sally D. Wilber, Alleghany post-office, Cattaraugus County, New York. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described."

And here, also, a characteristic scene in another of those long barracks: —

"It is Sunday afternoon (middle of summer, 1864), hot and oppressive, and very silent through the ward. I am taking care of a critical case, now lying in a half lethargy. Near where I sit is a suffering rebel, from the 8th Louisiana; his name

is Irving. He has been here a long time, badly wounded, and has lately had his leg amputated. It is not doing very well. Right opposite me is a sick soldier boy, laid down with his clothes on, sleeping, looking much wasted, his pallid face on his arm. I see by the yellow trimming on his jacket that he is a cavalry boy. He looks so handsome as he sleeps, one must needs go nearer to him. I step softly over to him, and find by his card that he is named William Cone, of the 1st Maine Cavalry, and his folks live in Skowhegan."

In a letter to his mother in 1863 he says, in reference to his hospital services: "I have got in the way, after going lightly, as it were, all through the wards of a hospital, and trying to give a word of cheer, if nothing else, to every one, then confining my special attention to the few where the investment seems to tell best, and who want it most. . . . Mother, I have real pride in telling you that I have the consciousness of saving quite a number of lives by keeping the men from giving up, and being a good deal with them. The men say it is so, and the doctors say it is so; and I will candidly confess I can see it is true, though I say it myself. I know you will like to hear it, mother, so I tell you."

Again he says: "I go among the worst fevers and wounds with impunity; I go among the smallpox, etc. just the same. I feel to go without apprehen-

sion, and so I go: nobody else goes; but, as the darkey said there at Charleston when the boat ran on a flat and the rebel sharpshooters were peppering them, '*somebody* must jump in de water and shove de boat off.'"

In another letter to his mother he thus accounts for his effect upon the wounded soldiers: "I fancy the reason I am able to do some good in the hospitals among the poor, languishing, and wounded boys, is that I am so large and well, — indeed, like a great wild buffalo with much hair. Many of the soldiers are from the West and far North, and they like a man that has not the bleached, shiny, and shaved cut of the cities and the East."

As to Whitman's appearance about this time, we get an inkling from another letter to his mother, giving an account of an interview he had with Senator Preston King, to whom Whitman applied for assistance in procuring a clerkship in one of the departments. King said to him, "Why, how can I do this thing, or anything for you? How do I know but you are a secessionist? You look for all the world like an old Southern planter, — a regular Carolina or Virginia planter."

The great suffering of the soldiers and their heroic fortitude move him deeply. He says to his mother: "Nothing of ordinary misfortune seems as it used to, and death itself has lost all its terrors; I have seen so many cases in which it was so welcome

and such a relief." Again: "I go to the hospitals every day or night. I believe no men ever loved each other as I and some of these poor wounded, sick, and dying men love each other."

Whitman's services in the hospitals began to tell seriously upon his health in June, 1864, when he had "spells of deathly faintness, and had trouble in the head." The doctors told him he must keep away for a while, but he could not. Under date of June 7, 1864, he writes to his mother: —

"There is a very horrible collection in Armory Building (in Armory Square Hospital), — about two hundred of the worst cases you ever saw, and I have probably been too much with them. It is enough to melt the heart of a stone. Over one third of them are amputation cases. Well, mother, poor Oscar Cunningham is gone at last (he is the 82d Ohio boy, wounded May 3, '63). I have written so much of him I suppose you feel as if you almost knew him. I was with him Saturday forenoon, and also evening. He was more composed than usual; could not articulate very well. He died about two o'clock Sunday morning, very easy, they told me. I was not there. It was a blessed relief. His life has been misery for months. I believe I told you, last letter, I was quite blue from the deaths of several of the poor young men I knew well, especially two of whom I had strong hopes of their getting up. Things are going pretty badly with the wounded. They are

crowded here in Washington in immense numbers, and all those that came up from the Wilderness and that region arrived here so neglected and in such plight it was awful (those that were at Fredericksburg, and also from Belle Plain). The papers are full of puffs, etc., but the truth is the largest proportion of worst cases get little or no attention.

"We receive them here with their wounds full of worms, — some all swelled and inflamed. Many of the amputations have to be done over again. One new feature is, that many of the poor, afflicted young men are crazy; every ward has some in it that are wandering. They have suffered too much, and it is perhaps a privilege that they are out of their senses. Mother, it is most too much for a fellow, and I sometimes wish I was out of it; but I suppose it is because I have not felt firstrate myself."

Of the Ohio soldier above referred to, Whitman had written a few days before: "You remember I told you of him a year ago, when he was first brought in. I thought him the noblest specimen of a young Western man I had seen. A real giant in size, and always with a smile on his face. Oh, what a change! He has long been very irritable to every one but me, and his frame is all wasted away."

To his brother Jeff he wrote: "Of the many I have seen die, or known of the past year, I have not seen or known of one who met death with any terror.

Yesterday I spent a good part of the afternoon with a young man of seventeen named Charles Cutter, of Lawrence City, 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, Battery M. He was brought into one of the hospitals mortally wounded in abdomen. Well, I thought to myself as I sat looking at him, it ought to be a relief to his folks, after all, if they could see how little he suffered. He lay very placid, in a half lethargy, with his eyes closed; it was very warm, and I sat a long while fanning him and wiping the sweat. At length he opened his eyes quite wide and clear, and looked inquiringly around. I said, 'What is it, my dear? do you want anything?' He said quietly, with a good-natured smile, 'Oh, nothing; I was only looking around to see who was with me.' His mind was somewhat wandering, yet he lay so peaceful in his dying condition. He seemed to be a real New England country boy, so good-natured, with a pleasant, homely way, and quite fine-looking. Without any doubt, he died in course of the night."

Another extract from a letter to his mother in April, 1864: —

"Mother, you don't know what a feeling a man gets after being in the active sights and influences of the camp, the army, the wounded, etc. He gets to have a deep feeling he never experienced before, — the flag, the tune of 'Yankee Doodle,' and similar things produce an effect on a fellow never felt

before. I have seen tears on the men's cheeks, and others turn pale under such circumstances. I have a little flag, — it belonged to one of our cavalry regiments, — presented to me by one of the wounded. It was taken by the rebs in a cavalry fight, and rescued by our men in a bloody little skirmish. It cost three men's lives just to get one little flag, four by three. Our men rescued it, and tore it from the breast of a dead rebel. All that just for the name of getting their little banner back again. The man that got it was very badly wounded, and they let him keep it. I was with him a good deal. He wanted to give me something, he said; he did not expect to live; so he gave me the little banner as a keepsake. I mention this, mother, to show you a specimen of the feeling. There is n't a regiment of cavalry or infantry that would n't do the same on occasion."

[An army surgeon, who at the time watched with curiosity Mr. Whitman's movements among the soldiers in the hospitals, has since told me that his principles of operation, effective as they were, seemed strangely few, simple, and on a low key, — to act upon the appetite, to cheer by a healthy and fitly bracing appearance and demeanor; and to fill and satisfy in certain cases the affectional longings of the patients, was about all. He carried among them no sentimentalism nor moralizing; spoke not to any man of his "sins," but gave something good

to eat, a buoying word, or a trifling gift and a look. He appeared with ruddy face, clean dress, with a flower or a green sprig in the lapel of his coat. Crossing the fields in summer, he would gather a great bunch of dandelion blossoms, and red and white clover, to bring and scatter on the cots, as reminders of out-door air and sunshine.

When practicable, he came to the long and crowded wards of the maimed, the feeble, and the dying, only after preparations as for a festival, — strengthened by a good meal, rest, the bath, and fresh underclothes. He entered with a huge haversack slung over his shoulder, full of appropriate articles, with parcels under his arms, and protuberant pockets. He would sometimes come in summer with a good-sized basket filled with oranges, and would go round for hours paring and dividing them among the feverish and thirsty.]

Of his devotion to the wounded soldiers there are many witnesses. A well-known correspondent of the "New York Herald" writes thus about him in April, 1876: —

"I first heard of him among the sufferers on the Peninsula after a battle there. Subsequently I saw him, time and again, in the Washington hospitals, or wending his way there, with basket or haversack on his arm, and the strength of beneficence suffusing his face. His devotion surpassed the devotion of woman. It would take a volume

to tell of his kindness, tenderness, and thoughtfulness.

"Never shall I forget one night when I accompanied him on his rounds through a hospital filled with those wounded young Americans whose heroism he has sung in deathless numbers. There were three rows of cots, and each cot bore its man. When he appeared, in passing along, there was a smile of affection and welcome on every face, however wan, and his presence seemed to light up the place as it might be lighted by the presence of the God of Love. From cot to cot they called him, often in tremulous tones or in whispers; they embraced him; they touched his hand; they gazed at him. To one he gave a few words of cheer; for another he wrote a letter home; to others he gave an orange, a few comfits, a cigar, a pipe and tobacco, a sheet of paper or a postage-stamp, all of which and many other things were in his capacious haversack. From another he would receive a dying message for mother, wife, or sweetheart; for another he would promise to go an errand; to another, some special friend very low, he would give a manly farewell kiss. He did the things for them no nurse or doctor could do, and he seemed to leave a benediction at every cot as he passed along. The lights had gleamed for hours in the hospital that night before he left it, and, as he took his way towards the door, you could hear the voices of many a stricken hero

calling 'Walt, Walt, Walt! come again! come again!' "

III

Out of that experience in camp and hospital the pieces called "Drum-Taps," first published in 1865, — since merged in his "Leaves," — were produced. Their descriptions and pictures, therefore, come from life. The vivid incidents of "The Dresser" are but daguerreotypes of the poet's own actual movements among the bad cases of the wounded after a battle. The same personal knowledge runs through "A Sight in Camp in the Daybreak Gray and Dim," "Come up from the Fields, Father," etc., etc.

The reader of this section of Whitman's work soon discovers that it is not the purpose of the poet to portray battles and campaigns, or to celebrate special leaders or military prowess, but rather to chant the human aspects of anguish that follow in the train of war. He perhaps feels that the permanent condition of modern society is that of peace; that war as a business, as a means of growth, has served its time; and that, notwithstanding the vast difference between ancient and modern warfare, both in the spirit and in the means, Homer's pictures are essentially true yet, and no additions to them can be made. War can never be to us what it has been to the nations of all ages down to the present; never the main fact, the paramount con-

dition, tyrannizing over all the affairs of national and individual life, but only an episode, a passing interruption; and the poet, who in our day would be as true to his nation and times as Homer was to his, must treat of it from the standpoint of peace and progress, and even benevolence. Vast armies rise up in a night and disappear in a day; a million of men, inured to battle and to blood, go back to the avocations of peace without a moment's confusion or delay, — indicating clearly the tendency that prevails.

Apostrophizing the genius of America in the supreme hour of victory, he says: —

"No poem proud, I, chanting, bring to thee — nor mastery's rapturous verse :—
But a little book containing night's darkness and blood-dripping wounds,
And psalms of the dead."

The collection is also remarkable for the absence of all sectional or partisan feeling. Under the head of "Reconciliation" are these lines: —

"Word over all, beautiful as the sky!
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost!
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world ;
. . . For my enemy is dead — a man divine as myself is dead ;

I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin —
I draw near;
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white
face in the coffin."

Perhaps the most noteworthy of Whitman's war poems is the one called "When Lilacs last in the Door-Yard bloomed," written in commemoration of President Lincoln.

The main effect of this poem is of strong, solemn, and varied music; and it involves in its construction a principle after which perhaps the great composers most work, — namely, spiritual auricular analogy. At first it would seem to defy analysis, so rapt is it, and so indirect. No reference whatever is made to the mere fact of Lincoln's death; the poet does not even dwell upon its unprovoked atrocity, and only occasionally is the tone that of lamentation; but, with the intuitions of the grand art, which is the most complex when it seems most simple, he seizes upon three beautiful facts of nature, which he weaves into a wreath for the dead President's tomb. The central thought is of death, but around this he curiously twines, first, the early-blooming lilacs which the poet may have plucked the day the dark shadow came; next the song of the hermit thrush, the most sweet and solemn of all our songsters, heard at twilight in the dusky cedars, and with these the evening star, which, as many may remember, night after night in the early part

of that eventful spring, hung low in the west with unusual and tender brightness. These are the premises from which he starts his solemn chant.

The attitude, therefore, is not that of being bowed down and weeping hopeless tears, but of singing a commemorative hymn, in which the voices of nature join, and it fits that exalted condition of the soul which serious events and the presence of death induce. There are no words of mere eulogy, no statistics, and no story or narrative; but there are pictures, processions, and a strange mingling of darkness and light, of grief and triumph: now the voice of the bird, or the drooping lustrous star, or the sombre thought of death; then a recurrence to the open scenery of the land as it lay in the April light, "the summer approaching with richness and the fields all busy with labor," presently dashed in upon by a spectral vision of armies with torn and bloody battle-flags, and, again, of the white skeletons of young men long afterward strewing the ground. Hence the piece has little or nothing of the character of the usual productions on such occasions. It is dramatic; yet there is no development of plot, but a constant interplay, a turning and returning of images and sentiments.

The poet breaks a sprig of lilac from the bush in the door-yard, — the dark cloud falls on the land, — the long funeral sets out, — and then the apostrophe: —

"Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night, with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags, with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves, as of crape-veiled women, standing,
With processions long and winding, and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit — with the silent sea of faces, and the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn;
With all the mournful voices of the dirges, pour'd around the coffin,
To dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs — Where amid these you journey,
With the tolling, tolling bells' perpetual clang;
Here! coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

"(Nor for you, for one alone;
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring;
For fresh as the morning — thus would I chant a song for you, O sane and sacred death.

"All over bouquets of roses,
O death! I cover you over with roses and early lilies;

But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious, I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes;
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you, O death.)"

Then the strain goes on: —

"O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be, for the grave of him I love?

"Sea-winds, blown from east and west,
Blown from the eastern sea, and blown from the western sea, till there on the prairies meeting:
These, and with these, and the breath of my chant,
I perfume the grave of him I love."

The poem reaches, perhaps, its height in the matchless invocation to Death: —

"Come, lovely and soothing Death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later, delicate Death.

"Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious;
And for love, sweet love — but praise! O praise and praise,
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.

"Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee — I glorify thee above all;
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come,
come unfalteringly.

"Approach, encompassing Death — strong Deliveress!
When it is so — when thou hast taken them, I joyously
sing the dead,
Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.

"From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee — adornments
and feastings for thee;
And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-spread
sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.
The night, in silence, under many a star;
The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave, whose
voice I know;
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd Death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee."

IV

Whitman despised riches, and all mere worldly success, as heartily as ever did any of the old Christians. All outward show and finery were intensely distasteful to him. He probably would not have accepted the finest house in New York on condition

that he live in it. During his hospital experiences he cherished the purpose, as soon as the war was over, of returning to Brooklyn, buying an acre or two of land in some by-place on Long Island, and building for himself and his family a cheap house. When his brother Jeff contemplated building, he advised him to build merely an Irish shanty. After what he had seen the soldiers put up with, he thought anything was good enough for him or his people. In one of his letters to his mother, he comments upon the un-American and inappropriate ornamentation of the rooms in the Capitol building, "without grandeur and without simplicity," he says. In the state the country was in, and with the hospital scenes before him, the "poppy-show goddesses" and the Italian style of decoration, etc., sickened him, and he got away from it all as quickly as he could.

V

During the war and after, I used to see a good deal of Whitman in Washington. Summer and winter he was a conspicuous figure on Pennsylvania Avenue, where he was wont to walk for exercise and to feed his hunger for faces. One would see him afar off, in the crowd but not of it, — a large, slow-moving figure, clad in gray, with broad-brimmed hat and gray beard, — or, quite as frequently, on the front platform of the street horse-cars with the driver. My eye used to single him out many blocks away.

There were times during this period when his aspect was rather forbidding, — the physical man was too pronounced on first glance; the other man was hidden beneath the broad-brimmed hat. One needed to see the superbly domed head and classic brow crowning the rank physical man.

In his middle manhood, judging from the photos, he had a hirsute, kindly look, but very far removed from the finely cut traditional poet's face.

VI

I have often heard Whitman say that he inherited most excellent blood from his mother, — the old Dutch Van Velser strain, — Long Island blood filtered and vitalized through generations by the breath of the sea. He was his mother's child unmistakably. With all his rank masculinity, there was a curious feminine undertone in him which revealed itself in the quality of his voice, the delicate texture of his skin, the gentleness of his touch and ways, the attraction he had for children and the common people. A lady in the West, writing to me about him, spoke of his "great mother-nature." He was receptive, sympathetic, tender, and met you, not in a positive, aggressive manner, but more or less in a passive or neutral mood. He did not give his friends merely his mind, he gave them himself. It is not merely his mind or intellect that he has put into his poems, it is himself. Indeed, this

feminine mood or attitude might be dwelt upon at much length in considering his poems, — their solvent, absorbing power, and the way they yield themselves to diverse interpretations.

The sea, too, had laid its hand upon him, as I have already suggested. He never appeared so striking and impressive as when seen upon the beach. His large and tall gray figure looked at home, and was at home, upon the shore. The simple, strong, flowing lines of his face, his always clean fresh air, his blue absorbing eye, his commanding presence, and something pristine and elemental in his whole expression, seemed at once to put him *en rapport* with the sea. No phase of nature seems to have impressed him so deeply as the sea, or recurs so often in his poems.

VII

Whitman was preëminently manly, — richly endowed with the universal, healthy human qualities and attributes. Mr. Conway relates that when Emerson handed him the first thin quarto edition of "Leaves of Grass," while he was calling at his house in Concord, soon after the book appeared, he said, "Americans abroad may now come home: unto us a man is born."

President Lincoln, standing one day during the war before a window in the White House, saw Whitman slowly saunter by. He followed him

with his eyes, and, turning, said to those about him, "Well, *he* looks like a *man*."

"Meeter of savage and gentleman on equal terms."

During Whitman's Western tour in 1879 or '80, at some point in Kansas, in company with several well-known politicians and government officials, he visited a lot of Indians who were being held as prisoners. The sheriff told the Indians who the distinguished men were who were about to see them, but the Indians paid little attention to them as, one after the other, the officials and editors passed by them. Behind all came Whitman. The old chief looked at him steadily, then extended his hand and said, "How!" All the other Indians followed, surrounding Whitman, shaking his hand and making the air melodious with their "Hows." The incident evidently pleased the old poet a good deal.

VIII

Whitman was of large mould in every way, and of bold, far-reaching schemes, and is very sure to fare better at the hands of large men than of small. The first and last impression which his personal presence always made upon one was of a nature wonderfully gentle, tender, and benignant. His culture, his intellect, was completely suffused and dominated by his humanity, so that the impression you got from him was not that of a learned or a

literary person, but of fresh, strong, sympathetic human nature, — such an impression, I fancy, only fuller, as one might have got from Walter Scott. This was perhaps the secret of the attraction he had for the common, unlettered people and for children. I think that even his literary friends often sought his presence less for conversation than to bask in his physical or psychical sunshine, and to rest upon his boundless charity. The great service he rendered to the wounded and homesick soldiers in the hospitals during the war came from his copious endowment of this broad, sweet, tender democratic nature. He brought father and mother to them, and the tonic and cheering atmosphere of simple, affectionate home life.

In person Whitman was large and tall, above six feet, with a breezy, open-air look. His temperament was sanguine; his voice was a tender baritone. The dominant impression he made was that of something fresh and clean. I remember the first time I met him, which was in Washington, in the fall of 1863. I was impressed by the fine grain and clean, fresh quality of the man. Some passages in his poems had led me to expect something different. He always had the look of a man who had just taken a bath. The skin was light and clear, and the blood well to the surface. His body as I once noticed when we were bathing in the surf, had a peculiar fresh bloom and fineness and

delicacy of texture. His physiology was undoubtedly remarkable, unique. The full beauty of his face and head did not appear till he was past sixty. After that, I have little doubt, it was the finest head this age or country has seen. Every artist who saw him was instantly filled with a keen desire to sketch him. The lines were so simple, so free, and so strong. High, arching brows; straight, clear-cut nose; heavy-lidded blue-gray eyes; forehead not thrust out and emphasized, but a vital part of a symmetrical, dome-shaped head; ear large, and the most delicately carved I have ever seen; the mouth and chin hidden by a soft, long, white beard. It seems to me his face steadily refined and strengthened with age. Time depleted him in just the right way, — softened his beard and took away the too florid look; subdued the carnal man, and brought out more fully the spiritual man. When I last saw him (December 26, 1891), though he had been very near death for many days, I am sure I had never seen his face so beautiful. There was no breaking-down of the features, or the least sign of decrepitude, such as we usually note in old men. The expression was full of pathos, but it was as grand as that of a god. I could not think of him as near death, he looked so unconquered.

In Washington I knew Whitman intimately from the fall of 1863 to the time he left in 1873. In Camden I visited him yearly after that date, usu-

ally in the late summer or fall. I will give one glimpse of him from my diary, under date of August 18, 1887. I reached his house in the morning, before he was up. Presently he came slowly downstairs and greeted me. "Find him pretty well, — looking better than last year. With his light-gray suit, and white hair, and fresh pink face, he made a fine picture. Among other things, we talked of the Swinburne attack (then recently published). W. did not show the least feeling on the subject, and, I clearly saw, was absolutely undisturbed by the article. I told him I had always been more disturbed by S.'s admiration for him than I was now by his condemnation. By and by W. had his horse hitched up, and we started for Glendale, ten miles distant, to see young Gilchrist, the artist. A fine drive through a level farming and truck-gardening country; warm, but breezy. W. drives briskly, and salutes every person we meet, little and big, black and white, male and female. Nearly all return his salute cordially. He said he knew but few of those he spoke to, but that, as he grew older, the old Long Island custom of his people, to speak to every one on the road, was strong upon him. One tipsy man in a buggy responded, 'Why, pap, how d' ye do, pap?' We talked of many things. I recall this remark of W., as something I had not before thought of, that it was difficult to see what the old feudal world would have

come to without Christianity: it would have been like a body acted upon by the centrifugal force without the centripetal. Those haughty lords and chieftains needed the force of Christianity to check and curb them, etc. W. knew the history of many prominent houses on the road: here a crazy man lived, with two colored men to look after him; there, in that fine house among the trees, an old maid, who had spent a large fortune on her house and lands, and was now destitute, yet she was a woman of remarkable good sense. We returned to Camden before dark, W. apparently not fatigued by the drive of twenty miles."

In death what struck me most about the face was its perfect symmetry. It was such a face, said Mr. Conway, as Rembrandt would have selected from a million. "It is the face of an aged loving child. As I looked, it was with the reflection that, during an acquaintance of thirty-six years, I never heard from those lips a word of irritation, or depreciation of any being. I do not believe that Buddha, of whom he appeared an avatar, was more gentle to all men, women, children, and living things."

IX

For one of the best pen-sketches of Whitman in his old age we are indebted to Dr. J. Johnston, a young Scotch physician of Bolton, England, who

visited Whitman in the summer of 1890. I quote from a little pamphlet which the doctor printed on his return home: —

"The first thing about himself that struck me was the physical immensity and magnificent proportions of the man, and, next, the picturesque majesty of his presence as a whole.

"He sat quite erect in a great cane-runged chair, cross-legged, and clad in rough gray clothes, with slippers on his feet, and a shirt of pure white linen, with a great wide collar edged with white lace, the shirt buttoned about midway down his breast, the big lapels of the collar thrown open, the points touching his shoulders, and exposing the upper portion of his hirsute chest. He wore a vest of gray homespun, but it was unbuttoned almost to the bottom. He had no coat on, and his shirt sleeves were turned up above the elbows, exposing most beautifully shaped arms, and flesh of the most delicate whiteness. Although it was so hot, he did not perspire visibly, while I had to keep mopping my face. His hands are large and massive, but in perfect proportion to the arms; the fingers long, strong, white, and tapering to a blunt end. His nails are square, showing about an eighth of an inch separate from the flesh, and I noticed that there was not a particle of impurity beneath any of them. But his majesty is concentrated in his head, which is set with leonine grace and dignity upon his broad,

square shoulders; and it is almost entirely covered with long, fine, straggling hair, silvery and glistening, pure and white as sunlit snow, rather thin on the top of his high, rounded crown, streaming over and around his large but delicately-shaped ears, down the back of his big neck; and, from his pinky-white cheeks and top lip, over the lower part of his face, right down to the middle of his chest, like a cataract of materialized, white, glistening vapor, giving him a most venerable and patriarchal appearance. His high, massive forehead is seamed with wrinkles. His nose is large, strong, broad, and prominent, but beautifully chiseled and proportioned, almost straight, very slightly depressed at the tip, and with deep furrows on each side, running down to the angles of the mouth. The eyebrows are thick and shaggy, with strong, white hair, very highly arched and standing a long way above the eyes, which are of a light blue with a tinge of gray, small, rather deeply set, calm, clear, penetrating, and revealing unfathomable depths of tenderness, kindness, and sympathy. The upper eyelids droop considerably over the eyeballs. The lips, which are partly hidden by the thick, white mustache, are full. The whole face impresses one with a sense of resoluteness, strength, and intellectual power, and yet withal a winning sweetness, unconquerable radiance, and hopeful joyousness. His voice is highly pitched and musical, with a timbre

which is astonishing in an old man. There is none of the tremor, quaver, or shrillness usually observed in them, but his utterance is clear, ringing, and most sweetly musical. But it was not in any one of these features that his charm lay so much as in his *tout ensemble*, and the irresistible magnetism of his sweet, aromatic presence, which seemed to exhale sanity, purity, and naturalness, and exercised over me an attraction which positively astonished me, producing an exaltation of mind and soul which no man's presence ever did before. I felt that I was here face to face with the living embodiment of all that was good, noble, and lovable in humanity."

X

British critics have spoken of Whitman's athleticism, his athletic temperament, etc., but he was in no sense a muscular man, an athlete. His body, though superb, was curiously the body of a child; one saw this in its form, in its pink color, and in the delicate texture of the skin. He took little interest in feats of strength or in athletic sports. He walked with a slow, rolling gait, indeed, moved slowly in all ways; he always had an air of infinite leisure. For several years, while a clerk in the Attorney-General's Office in Washington, his exercise for an hour each day consisted in tossing a few feet into the air, as he walked, a round, smooth stone, of

about one pound weight, and catching it as it fell. Later in life, and after his first paralytic stroke, when in the woods, he liked to bend down the young saplings, and exercise his arms and chest in that way. In his poems much emphasis is laid upon health, and upon purity and sweetness of body, but none upon mere brute strength. This is what he says "To a Pupil:" —

1. Is reform needed? Is it through you?
   The greater the reform needed, the greater the PERSONALITY you need to accomplish it.

2. You! do you not see how it would serve to have eyes, blood, complexion, clean and sweet?
   Do you not see how it would serve to have such a body and Soul, that when you enter the crowd, an atmosphere of desire and command enters with you, and every one is impressed with your personality?

3. O the magnet! the flesh over and over!
   Go, mon cher! if need be, give up all else, and commence to-day to inure yourself to pluck, reality, self-esteem, definiteness, elevatedness,
   Rest not, till you rivet and publish yourself of your own personality.

It is worthy of note that Whitman's Washington physician said he had one of the most thoroughly natural physical systems he had ever known, — the freest, probably, from extremes or any dispropor-

tion; which answers to the perfect sanity which all his friends must have felt with regard to his mind.

A few years ago a young English artist stopping in this country made several studies of him. In one of them which he showed me, he had left the face blank, but had drawn the figure from the head down with much care. It was so expressive, so unmistakably Whitman, conveyed so surely a certain majesty and impressiveness that pertained to the poet physically, that I looked upon it with no ordinary interest. Every wrinkle in the garments seemed to proclaim the man. Probably a similar painting of any of one's friends would be more or less a recognizable portrait, but I doubt if it would speak so emphatically as did this incomplete sketch. I thought it all the more significant in this case because Whitman laid such stress upon the human body in his poems, built so extensively upon it, curiously identifying it with the soul, and declaring his belief that if he made the poems of his body and of mortality he would thus supply himself with the poems of the soul and of immortality. "Behold," he says, "the body includes and is the meaning, the main concern, and includes and is the soul; whoever you are, how superb and how divine is your body, or any part of it!" He runs this physiological thread all through his book, and strings upon it many valuable lessons and many noble sentiments. Those who knew him well, I think, will

agree with me that his bodily presence was singularly magnetic, restful, and positive, and that it furnished a curious and suggestive commentary upon much there is in his poetry.

The Greeks, who made so much more of the human body than we do, seem not to have carried so much meaning, so much history, in their faces as does the modern man; the soul was not concentrated here, but was more evenly distributed over the whole body. Their faces expressed repose, harmony, power of command. I think Whitman was like the Greeks in this respect. His face had none of the eagerness, sharpness, nervousness, of the modern face. It had but few lines, and these were Greek. From the mouth up, the face was expressive of Greek purity, simplicity, strength, and repose. The mouth was large and loose, and expressive of another side of his nature. It was a mouth that required the check and curb of that classic brow.

And the influence of his poems is always on the side of physiological cleanliness and strength, and severance from all that corrupts and makes morbid and mean. He says the "expression of a well-made man appears not only in his face: it is in his limbs and joints also; it is curiously in the joints of his hips and wrists; it is in his walk, the carriage of his neck, the flex of his waist and knees; dress does not hide him; the strong, sweet, supple quality he has strikes through the cotton and flannel; to

see him pass conveys as much as the best poem, perhaps more. You linger to see his back, and the back of his neck and shoulder-side." He says he has perceived that to be with those he likes is enough: "To be surrounded by beautiful, curious, breathing, laughing flesh is enough, — I do not ask any more delight; I swim in it, as in a sea. There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and in the contact and odor of them, that pleases the soul well. All things please the soul, but these please the soul well." Emerson once asked Whitman what it was he found in the society of the common people that satisfied him so; for his part, he could not find anything. The subordination by Whitman of the purely intellectual to the human and physical, which runs all through his poems and is one source of their power, Emerson, who was deficient in the sensuous, probably could not appreciate.

XI

The atmosphere of Whitman personally was that of a large, tolerant, tender, sympathetic, restful man, easy of approach, indifferent to any special social or other distinctions and accomplishments that might be yours, and regarding you from the start for yourself alone.

Children were very fond of him; and women, unless they had been prejudiced against him, were

strongly drawn toward him. His personal magnetism was very great, and was warming and cheering. He was rich in temperament, probably beyond any other man of his generation, — rich in all the purely human and emotional endowments and basic qualities. Then there was a look about him hard to describe, and which I have seen in no other face, — a gray, brooding, elemental look, like the granite rock, something primitive and Adamic that might have belonged to the first man; or was it a suggestion of the gray, eternal sea that he so loved, near which he was born, and that had surely set its seal upon him? I know not, but I feel the man with that look is not of the day merely, but of the centuries. His eye was not piercing, but absorbing, — "draining" is the word happily used by William O'Connor; the soul back of it drew things to himself, and entered and possessed them through sympathy and personal force and magnetism, rather than through mere intellectual force.

XII

Walt Whitman was of the people, the common people, and always gave out their quality and atmosphere. His commonness, his nearness, as of the things you have always known, — the day, the sky, the soil, your own parents, — were in no way veiled, or kept in abeyance, by his culture or poetic gifts. He was redolent of the human and the fa-

miliar. Though capable, on occasions, of great pride and hauteur, yet his habitual mood and presence was that of simple, average, healthful humanity, — the virtue and flavor of sailors, soldiers, laborers, travelers, or people who live with real things in the open air. His commonness rose into the uncommon, the extraordinary, but without any hint of the exclusive or specially favored. He was indeed "no sentimentalist, no stander above men and women or apart from them."

The spirit that animates every page of his book, and that it always effuses, is the spirit of common, universal humanity, — humanity apart from creeds, schools, conventions, from all special privileges and refinements, as it is in and of itself in its relations to the whole system of things, in contradistinction to the literature of culture which effuses the spirit of the select and exclusive.

His life was the same. Walt Whitman never stood apart from or above any human being. The common people — workingmen, the poor, the illiterate, the outcast — saw themselves in him, and he saw himself in them: the attraction was mutual. He was always content with common, unadorned humanity. Specially intellectual people rather repelled him; the wit, the scholar, the poet, must have a rich endowment of the common, universal, human attributes and qualities to pass current with him. He sought the society of boatmen, railroad

men, farmers, mechanics, printers, teamsters, mothers of families, rather than the society of professional men or scholars. Men who had the quality of things in the open air — the virtue of rocks, trees, hills — drew him most; and it is these qualities and virtues that he has aimed above all others to put into his poetry, and to put them there in such a way that he who reads must feel and imbibe them.

The recognized poets put into their pages the virtue and quality of the fine gentleman, or of the sensitive, artistic nature: this poet of democracy effuses the atmosphere of fresh, strong Adamic man, — man acted upon at first hand by the shows and forces of universal nature.

If our poet ever sounds the note of the crude, the loud, the exaggerated, he is false to himself and to his high aims. I think he may be charged with having done so a few times, in his earlier work, but not in his later. In the 1860 edition of his poems stands this portraiture, which may stand for himself, with one or two features rather overdrawn: —

"His shape arises
Arrogant, masculine, naïve, rowdyish,
Laugher, weeper, worker, idler, citizen, countryman,
Saunterer of woods, stander upon hills, summer swimmer
in rivers or by the sea,
Of pure American breed, of reckless health, his body perfect, free from taint from top to toe, free forever from headache and dyspepsia, clean-breathed,

Ample-limbed, a good feeder, weight a hundred and eighty pounds, full-blooded, six feet high, forty inches round the breast and back,

Countenance sunburnt, bearded, calm, unrefined,

Reminder of animals, meeter of savage and gentleman on equal terms,

Attitudes lithe and erect, costume free, neck gray and open, of slow movement on foot,

Passer of his right arm round the shoulders of his friends, companion of the street,

Persuader always of people to give him their sweetest touches, and never their meanest.

A Manhattanese bred, fond of Brooklyn, fond of Broadway, fond of the life of the wharves and the great ferries,

Enterer everywhere, welcomed everywhere, easily understood after all,

Never offering others, always offering himself, corroborating his phrenology,

Voluptuous, inhabitive, combative, conscientious, alimentive, intuitive, of copious friendship, sublimity, firmness, self-esteem, comparison, individuality, form, locality, eventuality,

Avowing by life, manners, words to contribute illustrations of results of These States,

Teacher of the unquenchable creed namely egotism,

Inviter of others continually henceforth to try their strength against his."

XIII

Whitman was determined, at whatever risk to his own reputation, to make the character which he has exploited in his poems a faithful compend of American humanity, and to do this the rowdy element could not be entirely ignored. Hence he unflinchingly imputes it to himself, as, for that matter, he has nearly every sin and dereliction mankind are guilty of.

Whitman developed slowly and late upon the side that related him to social custom and usage, — to the many fictions, concealments, make-believes, and subterfuges of the world of parlors and drawing-rooms. He never was an adept in what is called "good form;" the natural man that he was shows crude in certain relations. His publication of Emerson's letter with its magnificent eulogium of "Leaves of Grass" has been much commented upon. There may be two opinions as to the propriety of his course in this respect: a letter from a stranger upon a matter of public interest is not usually looked upon as a private letter. Emerson never spoke with more felicity and penetration than he does in this letter; but it is for Whitman's own sake that we would have had him practice self-denial in the matter; he greatly plumed himself upon Emerson's indorsement, and was guilty of the very bad taste of printing a sentence from the letter upon the cover of

the next edition of his book. Grant that it showed a certain crudeness, unripeness, in one side of the man; later in life, he could not have erred in this way. Ruskin is reported saying that he never in his life wrote a letter to any human being that he would not be willing should be posted up in the market-place or cried by the public crier through the town. But Emerson was a much more timid and conforming man than Ruskin, and was much more likely to be shocked by such a circumstance.

It has been said that the publication of this letter much annoyed Emerson, and that he never forgave Whitman the offense. That he was disturbed by it and by the storm that arose there can be little doubt; but there is no evidence that he allowed the fact to interfere with his friendship for the poet. Charles W. Eldridge, who personally knew of the relations of the two men, says: —

"There was not a year from 1855 (the date of the Emerson letter and its publication) down to 1860 (the year Walt came to Boston to supervise the issue of the Thayer & Eldridge edition of 'Leaves of Grass'), that Emerson did not personally seek out Walt at his Brooklyn home, usually that they might have a long symposium together at the Astor House in New York. Besides that, during these years Emerson sent many of his closest friends, including Alcott and Thoreau, to see Walt, giving

them letters of introduction to him. This is not the treatment usually accorded a man who has committed an unpardonable offense.

"I know that afterwards, during Walt's stay in Boston, Emerson frequently came down from Concord to see him, and that they had many walks and talks together, these conferences usually ending with a dinner at the American House, at that time Emerson's favorite Boston hotel. On several occasions they met by appointment in our counting-room. Their relations were as cordial and friendly as possible, and it was always Emerson who sought out Walt, and never the other way, although, of course, Walt appreciated and enjoyed Emerson's companionship very much. In truth, Walt never sought the company of notables at all, and was always very shy of purely literary society. I know that at this time Walt was invited by Emerson to Concord, but declined to go, probably through his fear that he would see too much of the literary coterie that then clustered there, chiefly around Emerson."

XIV

Whitman gave himself to men as men and not as scholars or poets, and gave himself purely as a man. While not specially averse to meeting people on literary or intellectual grounds, yet it was more to his taste to meet on the broadest, commonest, human

grounds. What you had seen or felt or suffered or done was of much more interest to him than what you had read or thought; your speculation about the soul interested him less than the last person you had met, or the last chore you had done.

Any glimpse of the farm, the shop, the household — any bit of real life, anything that carried the flavor and quality of concrete reality — was very welcome to him; herein, no doubt, showing the healthy, objective, artist mind. He never tired of hearing me talk about the birds or wild animals, or my experiences in camp in the woods, the kind of characters I had met there, and the flavor of the life of remote settlements in Maine or Canada. His inward, subjective life was ample of itself; he was familiar with all your thoughts and speculations beforehand: what he craved was wider experience, — to see what you had seen, and feel what you had felt. He was fond of talking with returned travelers and explorers, and with sailors, soldiers, mechanics; much of his vast stores of information upon all manner of subjects was acquired at first-hand, in the old way, from the persons who had seen or done or been what they described or related.

He had almost a passion for simple, unlettered humanity, — an attraction which specially intellectual persons will hardly understand. Schooling and culture are so often purchased at such an expense to the innate, fundamental human qualities! Igno-

rance, with sound instincts and the quality which converse with real things imparts to men, was more acceptable to him than so much of our sophisticated knowledge, or our studied wit, or our artificial poetry.

XV

At the time of Whitman's death, one of our leading literary journals charged him with having brought on premature decay by leading a riotous and debauched life. I hardly need say that there was no truth in the charge. The tremendous emotional strain of writing his "Leaves," followed by his years of service in the army hospitals, where he contracted blood-poison, resulted at the age of fifty-four in the rupture of a small blood-vessel in the brain, which brought on partial paralysis. A sunstroke during his earlier manhood also played its part in the final break-down.

That, tried by the standard of the lives of our New England poets, Whitman's life was a blameless one, I do not assert; but that it was a sane, temperate, manly one, free from excesses, free from the perversions and morbidities of a mammonish, pampered, over-stimulated age, I do believe. Indeed, I may say I know. The one impression he never failed to make — physically, morally, intellectually — on young and old, women and men, was that of health, sanity, sweetness. This is the impression he

seems to have made upon Mr. Howells, when he met the poet at Pfaff's early in the sixties.

The critic I have alluded to inferred license in the man from liberty in the poet. He did not have the gumption to see that Whitman made the experience of all men his own, and that his scheme included the evil as well as the good; that especially did he exploit the unloosed, all-loving, all-accepting natural man, — the man who is done with conventions, illusions, and all morbid pietisms, and who gives himself lavishly to all that begets and sustains life. Yet not the natural or carnal man for his own sake, but for the sake of the spiritual meanings and values to which he is the key. Indeed, Whitman is about the most uncompromising spiritualist in literature; with him, all things exist by and for the soul. He felt the tie of universal brotherhood, also, as few have felt it. It was not a theory with him, but a fact that shaped his life and colored his poems. "Whoever degrades another degrades me," and the thought fired his imagination.

XVI

The student of Whitman's life and works will be early struck by three things, — his sudden burst into song, the maturity of his work from the first, and his self-knowledge and self-estimate. The fit of inspiration came upon him suddenly; it was like the flowering of the orchards in spring; there was

little or no hint of it till almost the very hour of the event. Up to the time of the appearance of the first edition of "Leaves of Grass," he had produced nothing above mediocrity. A hack writer on newspapers and magazines, then a carpenter and house-builder in a small way, then that astounding revelation "Leaves of Grass," the very audacity of it a gospel in itself. How dare he do it? how could he do it, and not betray hesitation or self-consciousness? It is one of the exceptional events in literary history. The main body of his work was produced in five or six years, or between 1854 and 1859. Of course it was a sudden flowering, which, consciously or unconsciously, must have been long preparing in his mind. His work must have had a long foreground, as Emerson suggested. Dr. Bucke, his biographer, thinks it was a special inspiration, — something analogous to Paul's conversion, a sudden opening of what the doctor calls "cosmic consciousness."

Another student and lover of Whitman says: "It is certain that some time about his thirty-fifth year [probably a little earlier] there came over him a decided change: he seemed immensely to broaden and deepen; he became less interested in what are usually regarded as the more practical affairs of life He lost what little ambition he ever had for money-making, and permitted good business opportunities to pass unheeded. He ceased to write the some-

what interesting but altogether commonplace and respectable stories and verses which he had been in the habit of contributing to periodicals. He would take long trips into the country, no one knew where, and would spend more time in his favorite haunts about the city, or on the ferries, or the tops of omnibuses, at the theatre and opera, in picture galleries, and wherever he could observe men and women and art and nature."

Then the maturity of his work from the first line of it! It seems as if he came into the full possession of himself and of his material at one bound, — never had to grope for his way and experiment, as most men do. What apprenticeship he served, or with whom he served it, we get no hint. He has come to his own, and is in easy, joyful possession of it, when he first comes into view. He outlines his scheme in his first poem, "Starting from Paumanok," and he has kept the letter and the spirit of every promise therein made. We never see him doubtful or hesitating; we never see him battling for his territory, and uncertain whether or not he is upon his own ground. He has an air of contentment, of mastery and triumph, from the start.

His extraordinary self-estimate and self-awareness are equally noticeable. We should probably have to go back to sacred history to find a parallel case. The manner of man he was, his composite character, his relation to his country and times, his unlikeness

to other poets, his affinity to the common people, how he would puzzle and elude his critics, how his words would itch at our ears till we understood them, etc., — how did he know all this from the first?

HIS RULING IDEAS AND AIMS

I

LET me here summarize some of the ideas and principles in which "Leaves of Grass" has its root, and from which it starts. A collection of poems in the usual sense, a variety of themes artistically treated and appealing to our æsthetic perceptibilities alone, it is not. It has, strictly speaking, but one theme, — personality, the personality of the poet himself. To exploit this is always the main purpose, and, in doing so, to make the book both directly and indirectly a large, impassioned utterance upon all the main problems of life and of nationality. It is primitive, like the early literature of a race or people, in that its spirit and purpose are essentially religious. It is like the primitive literatures also in its prophetic cry and in its bardic simplicity and homeliness, and unlike them in its faith and joy and its unconquerable optimism.

It has been not inaptly called the bible of democracy. Its biblical features are obvious enough with the darker negative traits left out. It is Israel with science and the modern added.

Whitman was swayed by a few great passions, — the passion for country, the passion for comrades,

the cosmic passion, etc. His first concern seems always to have been for his country. He has touched no theme, named no man, not related in some way to America. The thought of it possessed him as thoroughly as the thought of Israel possessed the old Hebrew prophets. Indeed, it is the same passion, and flames up with the same vitality and power, — the same passion for race and nativity enlightened by science and suffused with the modern humanitarian spirit. Israel was exclusive and cruel. Democracy, as exemplified in Walt Whitman, is compassionate and all-inclusive: —

"My spirit has passed in compassion and determination
around the whole earth,
I have looked for equals and lovers, and found them ready
for me in all lands;
I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them.

"O vapors! I think I have risen with you, and moved
away to distant continents, and fallen down there,
for reasons,
I think I have blown with you, O winds,
O waters, I have fingered every shore with you."

II

The work springs from the modern democratic conception of society, — of absolute social equality.

It embodies the modern scientific conception of the universe, as distinguished from the old theologi-

cal conception, — namely, that creation is good and sound in all its parts.

It embodies a conception of evil as a part of the good, of death as the friend and not the enemy of life.

It places comradeship, manly attachment, above sex love, and indicates it as the cement of future states and republics.

It makes the woman the equal of the man, his mate and not his toy.

It treats sexuality as a matter too vital and important to be ignored or trifled with, much less perverted or denied. A full and normal sexuality, — upon this the race stands. We pervert, we deny, we corrupt sex at our peril. Its perversions and abnormalities are to be remedied by a frank and fervent recognition of it, almost a new Priapic cult.

It springs from a conception of poetry quite different from the current conception. It aims at the poetry of things rather than of words, and works by suggestion and indirection rather than by elaboration.

It aims to project into literature a conception of the new democratic man, — a type larger, more copious, more candid, more religious, than we have been used to. It finds its ideals, not among scholars o in the parlor or counting-houses, but among workers, doers, farmers, mechanics, the heroes of land and sea.

Hence the atmosphere which it breathes and effuses is that of real things, real men and women. It has not the perfume of the distilled and concentrated, but the all but impalpable odor of the open air, the shore, the wood, the hilltop. It aims, not to be a book, but to be a man.

Its purpose is to stimulate and arouse, rather than to soothe and satisfy. It addresses the character, the intuitions, the ego, more than the intellect or the purely æsthetic faculties. Its end is not taste, but growth in the manly virtues and powers.

Its religion shows no trace of theology, or the conventional pietism.

It aspires to a candor and a directness like that of Nature herself.

It aims to let Nature speak without check, with original energy. The only checks are those which health and wholeness demand.

Its standards are those of the natural universal.

Its method is egocentric. The poet never goes out of himself, but draws everything into himself and makes it all serve to illustrate his personality.

Its form is not what is called artistic. Its suggestion is to be found in organic nature, in trees, clouds, and in the vital and flowing currents.

In its composition the author was doubtless greatly influenced by the opera and the great singers, and the music of the great composers. He

would let himself go in the same manner and seek his effects through multitude and the quality of the living voice.

Finally, "Leaves of Grass" is an utterance out of the depths of primordial, aboriginal human nature. It embodies and exploits a character not rendered anæmic by civilization, but preserving a sweet and sane savagery, indebted to culture only as a means to escape culture, reaching back always, through books, art, civilization, to fresh, unsophisticated nature, and drawing his strength from this source.

Another of the ideas that master Whitman and rule him is the idea of identity, — that you are you and I am I, and that we are henceforth secure whatever comes or goes. He revels in this idea; it is fruitful with him; it begets in him the ego-enthusiasm, and is at the bottom of his unshakable faith in immortality. It leavens all his work. It cannot be too often said that the book is not merely a collection of pretty poems, themes elaborated and followed out at long removes from the personality of the poet, but a series of *sorties* into the world of materials, the American world, piercing through the ostensible shows of things to the interior meanings, and illustrating in a free and large way the genesis and growth of a man, his free use of the world about him, appropriating it to himself, seeking his spiritual identity through its various objects and experi-

ences, and giving in many direct and indirect ways the meaning and satisfaction of life. There is much in it that is not poetical in the popular sense, much that is neutral and negative, and yet is an integral part of the whole, as is the case in the world we inhabit. If it offends, it is in a wholesome way, like objects in the open air.

III

Whitman rarely celebrates exceptional characters. He loves the common humanity, and finds his ideals among the masses. It is not difficult to reconcile his attraction toward the average man, towards workingmen and "powerful, uneducated persons," with the ideal of a high excellence, because he finally rests only upon the most elevated and heroic personal qualities, — elevated but well grounded in the common and universal.

The types upon which he dwells the most fondly are of the common people.

"I knew a man,
He was a common farmer — he was the father of five sons,
And in them were the fathers of sons — and in them were the fathers of sons.

"This man was of wonderful vigor, calmness, beauty of person,
The shape of his head, the richness and breadth of his manners, the pale yellow and white of his hair and

beard, and the immeasurable meaning of his black eyes,
These I used to go and visit him to see — he was wise also,
He was six feet tall, he was over eighty years old — his sons were massive, clean, bearded, tan-faced, handsome,
They and his daughters loved him — all who saw him loved him,
They did not love him by allowance — they loved him with personal love;
He drank water only — the blood showed like scarlet through the clear-brown skin of his face,
He was a frequent gunner and fisher — he sailed his boat himself — he had a fine one presented to him by a ship-joiner — he had fowling-pieces presented to him by men that loved him;
When he went with his five sons and many grandsons to hunt or fish, you would pick him out as the most beautiful and vigorous of the gang,
You would wish long and long to be with him — you would wish to sit by him in the boat, that you and he might touch each other."

All the *motifs* of his work are the near, the vital, the universal; nothing curious, or subtle, or far-fetched. His working ideas are democracy, equality, personality, nativity, health, sexuality, comradeship, self-esteem, the purity of the body, the equality of the sexes, etc. Out of them his work radiates. They are the eyes with which it sees, the ears

with which it hears, the feet upon which it goes. The poems are less like a statement, an argument, an elucidation, and more like a look, a gesture, a tone of voice.

"The word I myself put primarily for the description of them as they stand at last," says the author, "is the word Suggestiveness."

"Leaves of Grass" requires a large perspective; you must not get your face too near the book. You must bring to it a magnanimity of spirit, — a charity and faith equal to its own. Looked at too closely, it often seems incoherent and meaningless; draw off a little and let the figure come out. The book is from first to last a most determined attempt, on the part of a large, reflective, loving, magnetic, rather primitive, thoroughly imaginative personality, to descend upon the materialism of the nineteenth century, and especially upon a new democratic nation now in full career upon this continent, with such poetic fervor and enthusiasm as to lift and fill it with the deepest meanings of the spirit and disclose the order of universal nature. The poet has taken shelter behind no precedent, or criticism, or partiality whatever, but has squarely and lovingly faced the oceanic amplitude and movement of the life of his times and land, and fused them in his fervid humanity, and imbued them with deepest poetic meanings. One of the most striking features of the book is the adequacy and composure, even

joyousness and elation, of the poet in the presence of the huge materialism and prosaic conditions of our democratic era. He spreads himself over it all, he accepts and absorbs it all, he rejects no part; and his quality, his individuality, shines through it all, as the sun through vapors. The least line, or fragment of a line, is redolent of Walt Whitman. It is never so much the theme treated as it is the man exploited and illustrated. Walt Whitman does not write poems, strictly speaking, — does not take a bit of nature or life or character and chisel and carve it into a beautiful image or object, or polish and elaborate a thought, embodying it in pleasing tropes and pictures. His purpose is rather to show a towering, loving, composite personality moving amid all sorts of materials, taking them up but for a moment, disclosing new meanings and suggestions in them, passing on, bestowing himself upon whoever or whatever will accept him, tossing hints and clews right and left, provoking and stimulating the thought and imagination of his reader, but finishing nothing for him, leaving much to be desired, much to be completed by him in his turn.

IV

The reader who would get at the spirit and meaning of "Leaves of Grass" must remember that its animating principle, from first to last, is Democracy, — that it is a work conceived and carried forward in

the spirit of the genius of humanity that is now in full career in the New World, — and that all things characteristically American (trades, tools, occupations, productions, characters, scenes) therefore have their places in it. It is intended to be a complete mirror of the times in which the life of the poet fell, and to show one master personality accepting, absorbing all and rising superior to it, — namely, the poet himself. Yet it is never Whitman that speaks so much as it is Democracy that speaks through him. He personifies the spirit of universal brotherhood, and in this character launches forth his "omnivorous words." What would seem colossal egotism, shameless confessions, or unworthy affiliations with low, rude persons, what would seem confounding good and bad, virtue and vice, etc., in Whitman the man, the citizen, but serves to illustrate the boundless compassion and saving power of Whitman as the spokesman of ideal Democracy. With this clew in mind, many difficult things are made plain and easy in the works of this much misunderstood poet.

Perhaps the single poem that throws most light upon his aims and methods, and the demand he makes upon his reader, is in "Calamus," and is as follows: —

"Whoever you are holding me now in hand,
Without one thing all will be useless,
I give you fair warning before you attempt me further,
I am not what you suppos'd, but far different.

"Who is he that would become my follower?
Who would sign himself a candidate for my affections?

"The way is suspicious, the result uncertain, perhaps destructive,
You would have to give up all else, I alone would expect to be your sole and exclusive standard,
Your novitiate would even then be long and exhausting,
The whole past theory of your life and all conformity to the lives around you would have to be abandon'd,
Therefore release me now before troubling yourself any further, let go your hand from my shoulders,
Put me down and depart on your way.

"Or else by stealth in some wood for trial,
Or back of a rock in the open air
(For in any roof'd room of a house I emerge not, nor in company,
And in libraries I lie as one dumb, a gawk, or unborn, or dead),
But just possibly with you on a high hill, first watching lest any person for miles around approach unawares,
Or possibly with you sailing at sea, or on the beach of the sea or some quiet island,
Here to put your lips upon mine I permit you,
With the comrade's long-dwelling kiss or the new husband's kiss,
For I am the new husband and I am the comrade.

"Or, if you will, thrusting me beneath your clothing,
Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip,
Carry me when you go forth over land or sea;
For thus merely touching you is enough, is best,
And thus touching you would I silently sleep and be carried eternally.

"But these leaves conning you con at peril,
For these leaves and me you will not understand,
They will elude you at first and still more afterward, I will certainly elude you,
Even while you should think you had unquestionably caught me, behold!
Already you see I have escaped from you.

"For it is not for what I have put into it that I have written this book,
Nor is it by reading it you will acquire it,
Nor do those know me best who admire me and vauntingly praise me,
Nor will the candidates for my love (unless at most a very few) prove victorious,
Nor will my poems do good only, they will do just as much evil, perhaps more,
For all is useless without that which you may guess at many times and not hit, that which I hinted at,
Therefore release me and depart on your way."

When one has fully mastered this poem he has got a pretty good hold upon Whitman's spirit and

method. His open-air standards, the baffling and elusive character of his work, the extraordinary demand it makes, its radical and far-reaching effects upon life, its direct cognizance of evil as a necessary part of the good (there was a human need of sin, said Margaret Fuller), its unbookish spirit and affiliations, its indirect and suggestive method, that it can be fully read only through our acquaintance with life and real things at first hand, etc., — all this and more is in the poem.

HIS SELF-RELIANCE

I

IT is over sixty years since Goethe said that to be a German author was to be a German martyr. I presume things have changed in Germany since those times, and that the Goethe of to-day does not encounter the jealousy and hatred the great poet and critic of Weimar seemed to have called forth. In Walt Whitman we in America have known an American author who was an American martyr in a more literal sense than any of the men named by the great German. More than Heine, or Rousseau, or Molière, or Byron, was Whitman a victim of the literary Philistinism of his country and times; but, fortunately for himself, his was a nature so large, tolerant, and self-sufficing that his martyrdom sat very lightly upon him. His unpopularity was rather a tonic to him than otherwise. It was of a kind that tries a man's mettle, and brings out his heroic traits if he has any. One almost envies him his unpopularity. It was of the kind that only the greatest ones have experienced, and that attests something extraordinary in the recipient of it. He said he was more resolute because all had denied him than he ever could have been had all accepted, and he added: —

"I heed not and have never heeded either cautions, majorities, nor ridicule."

There are no more precious and tonic pages in history than the records of men who have faced unpopularity, odium, hatred, ridicule, detraction, in obedience to an inward voice, and never lost courage or good-nature. Whitman's is the most striking case in our literary annals, — probably the most striking one in our century outside of politics and religion. The inward voice alone was the oracle he obeyed: "My commission obeying, to question it never daring."

The bitter-sweet cup of unpopularity he drained to its dregs, and drained it cheerfully, as one knowing beforehand that it is preparing for him and cannot be avoided.

"Have you learn'd lessons only of those who admired you and were tender with you? and stood aside for you?
Have you not learn'd great lessons from those who reject you, and brace themselves against you? or who treat you with contempt, or dispute the passage with you?"

Every man is a partaker in the triumph of him who is always true to himself and makes no compromises with customs, schools, or opinions. Whitman's life, underneath its easy tolerance and cheerful good-will, was heroic. He fought his battle

against great odds and he conquered; he had his own way, he yielded not a hair to the enemy.

The pressure brought to bear upon him by the press, by many of his friends, and by such a man as Emerson, whom he deeply reverenced, to change or omit certain passages from his poems, seems only to have served as the opposing hammer that clinched the nail. The louder the outcry the more deeply he felt it his duty to stand by his first convictions. The fierce and scornful opposition to his sex poems, and to his methods and aims generally, was probably more confirmatory than any approval could have been. It went to the quick. During a dark period of his life, when no publisher would touch his book and when its exclusion from the mails was threatened, and poverty and paralysis were upon him, a wealthy Philadelphian offered to furnish means for its publication if he would omit certain poems; but the poet does not seem to have been tempted for one moment by the offer. He cheerfully chose the heroic part, as he always did.

Emerson reasoned and remonstrated with him for hours, walking up and down Boston Common, and after he had finished his argument, says Whitman, which was unanswerable, "I felt down in my soul the clear and unmistakable conviction to disobey all, and pursue my own way." He told Emerson so, whereupon they went and dined together. The

independence of the poet probably impressed Emerson more than his yielding would have done, for had not he preached the adamantine doctrine of self-trust? "To believe your own thought," he says, "to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true of all men, — that is genius."

In many ways was Whitman, quite unconsciously to himself, the man Emerson invoked and prayed for, — the absolutely self-reliant man; the man who should find his own day and land sufficient; who had no desire to be Greek, or Italian, or French, or English, but only himself; who should not whine, or apologize, or go abroad; who should not duck, or deprecate, or borrow; and who could see through the many disguises and debasements of our times the lineaments of the same gods that so ravished the bards of old.

The moment a man "acts for himself," says Emerson, "tossing the laws, the books, idolatries, and customs out of the window, we pity him no more, but thank and revere him."

Whitman took the philosopher at his word. "Greatness once and forever has done with opinion," even the opinion of the good Emerson. "Heroism works in contradiction to the voice of mankind, and in contradiction, for a time, to the voice of the great and good." "Every heroic act measures itself by its contempt of some external good," — popularity, for instance. "The character-

istic of heroism is persistency." "When you have chosen your part abide by it, and do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world." "Adhere to your act, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant, and broken the monotony of a decorous age." Heroism "is the avowal of the unschooled man that he finds a quality in him that is negligent of expense, of health, of life, of danger, of hatred, of reproach, and knows that his will is higher and more excellent than all actual and all possible antagonists." "A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he." "Great works of art," he again says, "teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-natured inflexibility, the more when the whole cry of voices is on the other side."

These brave sayings of Emerson were all illustrated and confirmed by Whitman's course. The spectacle of this man sitting there by the window of his little house in Camden, poor and partially paralyzed, and looking out upon the trite and commonplace scenes and people, or looking athwart the years and seeing only detraction and denial, yet always serene, cheerful, charitable, his wisdom and tolerance ripening and mellowing with time, is something to treasure and profit by. He was a man who needed no assurances. He had the patience and the leisure of nature. He welcomed

your friendly and sympathetic word, or with equal composure he did without it.

I remember calling upon him shortly after Swinburne's fierce onslaught upon him had been published, some time in the latter part of the eighties. I was curious to see how Whitman took it, but I could not discover either in word or look that he was disturbed a particle by it. He spoke as kindly of Swinburne as ever. If he was pained at all, it was on Swinburne's account and not on his own. It was a sad spectacle to see a man retreat upon himself as Swinburne had done. In fact I think hostile criticism, fiercely hostile, gave Whitman nearly as much comfort as any other. Did it not attest reality? Men do not brace themselves against shadows. Swinburne's polysyllabic rage showed the force of the current he was trying to stem. As for Swinburne's hydrocephalic muse, I do not think Whitman took any interest in it from the first.

Self-reliance, or self-trust, is one of the principles Whitman announces in his "Laws for Creations." He saw that no first-class work is possible except it issue from a man's deepest, most radical self.

"What do you suppose creation is?
What do you suppose will satisfy the soul but to walk free
and own no superior?
What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hun-

dred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God?

And that there is no God any more divine than yourself?

And that that is what the oldest and newest myths finally mean?

And that you or any one must approach creations through such laws?"

I think it probable that Whitman anticipated a long period of comparative oblivion for himself and his works. He knew from the first that the public would not be with him; he knew that the censors of taste, the critics and literary professors, would not be with him; he knew that the vast army of Philistia, the respectable, fashionable mammon-worshiping crowd, would not be with him, — that the timid, the pampered, the prurient, the conforming, the bourgeoisie spirit, the class spirit, the academic spirit, the Pharisaic spirit in all its forms, would all work against him; and that, as in the case of nearly all original, first-class men, he would have to wait to be understood for the growth of the taste of himself. None knew more clearly than he did how completely our people were under the illusion of the genteel and the conventional, and that, even among the emancipated few, the possession of anything like robust æsthetic perception was rare enough. America, so bold and original and independent in the world of practical politics and material endeavor, is, in spiritual and imaginative regions,

timid, conforming, imitative. There is, perhaps, no civilized country in the world wherein the native, original man, the real critter, as Whitman loved to say, that underlies all our culture and conventions, crops out so little in manners, in literature, and in social usages. The fear of being unconventional is greater with us than the fear of death. A certain evasiveness, polish, distrust of ourselves, amounting to insipidity and insincerity, is spoken of by observant foreigners. In other words, we are perhaps the least like children of any people in the world. All these things were against Whitman, and will continue to be against him for a long time. With the first stroke he broke through the conventional and took his stand upon the natural. With rude hands he tore away the veils and concealments from the body and from the soul. He ignored entirely all social and conventional usages and hypocrisies, not by revolt against them, but by choosing a point of view from which they disappeared. He embraced the unrefined and the savage as well as the tender and human. The illusions of the past, the models and standards, he freed himself of at once, and declared for the beauty and the divinity of the now and the here. The rude realism of his "Leaves" shocked like a plunge in the surf, but it invigorated also, if we were strong enough to stand it.

Out of Whitman's absolute self-trust arose his

prophetic egotism, — the divine fervor and audacity of the simple ego. He shared the conviction of the old prophets that man is a part of God, and that there is nothing in the universe any more divine than the individual soul. "I, too," he says, and this line is the key to much there is in his work —

> "I, too, have felt the resistless call of myself."

With the old Biblical writers the motions of their own spirits, their thoughts, their dreams, were as the voice of God. There is something of the same sort in Whitman. The voice of that inner self was final and authoritative with him. It was the voice of God. He could drive through and over all the conventions of the world in obedience to that voice. This call to him was as a voice from Sinai. One of his mastering thoughts was the thought of identity, — that you are you, and I am I. This was the final meaning of things, and the meaning of immortality. "Yourself, *yourself*, YOURSELF," he says, with swelling vehemence, "forever and ever." To be compacted and riveted and fortified in yourself, so as to be a law unto yourself, is the final word of the past and of the present.

II

The shadow of Whitman's self-reliance and heroic self-esteem — the sort of eddy or back-water — was undoubtedly a childlike fondness for praise and for

seeing his name in print. In his relaxed moments, when the stress of his task was not upon him, he was indeed in many respects a child. He had a child's delight in his own picture. He enjoyed hearing himself lauded as Colonel Ingersoll lauded him in his lecture in Philadelphia, and as his friends lauded him at his birthday dinner parties during the last two or three years of his life; he loved to see his name in print, and items about himself in the newspapers; he sometimes wrote them himself and gave them to the reporters. And yet nothing is surer than that he shaped his life and did his work absolutely indifferent to either praise or blame; in fact, that he deliberately did that which he knew would bring him dispraise. The candor and openness of the man's nature would not allow him to conceal or feign anything. If he loved praise, why should he not be frank about it? Did he not lay claim to the vices and vanities of men also? At its worst, Whitman's vanity was but the foible of a great nature, and should count for but little in the final estimate. The common human nature to which he lay claim will assert itself; it is not always to be kept up to the heroic pitch.

III

It was difficult to appreciate his liking for the newspaper. But he had been a newspaper man himself; the printer's ink had struck in; he had

many associations with the press-room and the composing-room; he loved the common, democratic character of the newspaper; it was the average man's library. The homely uses to which it was put, and the humble firesides to which it found its way, endeared it to him, and made him love to see his name in it.

Whitman's vanity was of the innocent, good-natured kind. He was as tolerant of your criticism as of your praise. Selfishness, in any unworthy sense, he had none. Offensive arrogance and self-assertion, in his life there was none.

His egotism is of the large generous species that never irritates or pricks into you like that of the merely conceited man. His love, his candor, his sympathy are on an equal scale.

His egotism comes finally to affect one like the independence and indifference of natural law. It takes little heed of our opinion, whether it be for or against, and keeps to its own way whatever befall.

Whitman's absolute faith in himself was a part of his faith in creation. He felt himself so keenly a part of the whole that he shared its soundness and excellence; he must be good as it is good.

IV

Whitman showed just enough intention, or premeditation in his life, dress, manners, attitudes in his pictures, self-portrayals in his poems, etc., to give

rise to the charge that he was a *poseur*. He was a *poseur* in the sense, and to the extent, that any man is a *poseur* who tries to live up to a certain ideal and to realize it in his outward daily life. It is clear that he early formed the habit of self-contemplation and of standing apart and looking upon himself as another person. Hence his extraordinary self-knowledge, and, we may also say, his extraordinary self-appreciation, or to use his own words, "the quite changed attitude of the ego, the one chanting or talking, towards himself." Of course there is danger in this attitude, but Whitman was large enough and strong enough to escape it. He saw himself to be the typical inevitable democrat that others have seen him to be, and with perfect candor and without ever forcing the note, he portrays himself as such. As his work is confessedly the poem of himself, himself magnified and projected, as it were, upon the canvas of a great age and country, all his traits and qualities stand out in heroic proportions, his pride and egotism as well as his love and tolerance.

"How beautiful is candor," he says. "All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor." The last thing that could ever be charged of Whitman is that he lacked openness, or was guilty of any deceit or concealments in his life or works.

From the studies, notes, and scrap-books which Whitman left, it appears that he was long preparing

and disciplining himself for the work he had in view. "The long foreground," to which Emerson referred in his letter, was of course a reality. But this self-consciousness and self-adjustment to a given end is an element of strength and not of weakness.

In the famous vestless and coatless portrait of himself prefixed to the first "Leaves of Grass" he assumes an attitude and is in a sense a *poseur;* but the reader comes finally to wonder at the marvelous self-knowledge the picture displays, and how strictly typical it is of the poet's mental and spiritual attitude towards the world, — independent, unconventional, audacious, yet inquiring and sympathetic in a wonderful degree. In the same way he posed in other portraits. A favorite with him is the one in which he sits contemplating a butterfly upon his forefinger — typical of a man "preoccupied of his own soul." In another he peers out curiously as from behind a mask. In an earlier one he stands, hat in hand, in marked *negligé* costume, — a little too intentional, one feels. The contempt of the polished ones is probably very strong within him at this time. I say contempt, though I doubt if Whitman ever felt contempt for any human being.

V

Then Whitman had a curious habit of standing apart, as it were, and looking upon himself and his career as of some other person. He was interested in his own cause, and took a hand in the discussion.

From first to last he had the habit of regarding himself objectively. On his deathbed he seemed to be a spectator of his own last moments, and was seen to feel his pulse a few minutes before he breathed his last.

He has recorded this trait in his poems: —

"Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,
Stands amused, complacent, compassionate, idle, waiting,
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it."

As also in this from "Calamus:" —

"That shadow my likeness that goes to and fro seeking a livelihood, chattering, chaffering,
How often I find myself standing and looking at it where it flits,
How often I question and doubt whether that is really me;
But among my lovers, and caroling these songs,
Oh, I never doubt whether that is really me."

Whitman always speaks as one having authority and not as a scribe, not as a mere man of letters. This is the privilege of the divine egoism of the prophet.

Like the utterances of the Biblical writers, without argument, without elaboration, his mere dictum seems the word of fate. It is not the voice of a man who has made his way through the world by rejecting and denying, but by accepting all and ris-

ing superior. What the "push of reading" or the push of argument could not start is often started and clinched by his mere authoritative "I say."

"I say where liberty draws not the blood out of slavery,
there slavery draws the blood out of liberty, . . .

"I say the human shape or face is so great it must never be
made ridiculous;
I say for ornaments nothing outré can be allowed,
And that anything is most beautiful without ornament,
And that exaggerations will be sternly revenged in your own
physiology and in other persons' physiologies also.

"Think of the past;
I warn you that in a little while others will find their past
in you and your times. . . .
Think of spiritual results.
Sure as the earth swims through the heavens, does every
one of its objects pass into spiritual results.
Think of manhood, and you to be a man;
Do you count manhood, and the sweet of manhood, no-
thing?
Think of womanhood and you to be a woman;
The Creation is womanhood;
Have I not said that womanhood involves all?
Have I not told how the universe has nothing better than
the best womanhood?"

Egotism is usually intolerant, but Whitman was one of the most tolerant of men.

A craving for sympathy and personal affection he certainly had; to be valued as a human being was more to him than to be valued as a poet. His strongest attachments were probably for persons who had no opinion, good or bad, of his poetry at all.

VI

Under close scrutiny his egotism turns out to be a kind of altru-egotism, which is vicarious and all-inclusive of his fellows. It is one phase of his democracy, and is vital and radical in his pages. It is a high, imperturbable pride in his manhood and in the humanity which he shares with all. It is the exultant and sometimes almost arrogant expression of the feeling which underlies and is shaping the whole modern world — the feeling and conviction that the individual man is above all forms, laws, institutions, conventions, bibles, religions — that the divinity of kings, and the sacredness of priests of the old order, pertains to the humblest person.

It was a passion that united him to his fellows rather than separated him from them. His pride was not that of a man who sets himself up above others, or who claims some special advantage or privilege, but that godlike quality that would make others share its great good-fortune. Hence we are not at all shocked when the poet, in the fervor of his love for mankind, determinedly imputes to himself all the sins and vices and follies of his fellow-

men. We rather glory in it. This self-abasement is the seal of the authenticity of his egotism. Without those things there might be some ground for the complaint of a Boston critic of Whitman that his work was not noble, because it celebrated pride, and did not inculcate the virtues of humility and self-denial. The great lesson of the "Leaves," flowing curiously out of its pride and egotism, is the lesson of charity, of self-surrender, and the free bestowal of yourself upon all hands.

The law of life of great art is the law of life in ethics, and was long ago announced.

He that would lose his life shall find it; he who gives himself the most freely shall the most freely receive. Whitman made himself the brother and equal of all, not in word, but in very deed; he was in himself a compend of the people for which he spoke, and this breadth of sympathy and free giving of himself has resulted in an unexpected accession of power.

HIS RELATION TO ART AND LITERATURE

I

WHITMAN protests against his "Leaves" being judged merely as literature; but at the same time, if they are not good literature, that of course ends the matter. Still, while the questions of art, of form, of taste, are paramount in most other poets, — certainly in all third and fourth rate poets, — in Whitman they are swallowed up in other questions and values.

In numerous passages, by various figures and allegories, Whitman indicates that he would not have his book classed with the order of mere literary productions.

"Shut not your doors to me, proud libraries," he says in one of the "Inscriptions," —

"For that which was lacking in all your well-fill'd shelves,
yet needed most, I bring.
Forth from the war emerging, a book I have made,
The words of my book nothing, the drift of it everything,
A book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the intellect,
But you, ye untold latencies will thrill to every page."

Not linked with the studied and scholarly productions, not open to the mere bookish mind, but more akin to the primitive utterances and oracles of historic humanity. A literary age like ours lays great stress upon the savor of books, art, culture, and has little taste for the savor of real things, the real man, which we get in Whitman.

"It is the true breath of humanity," says Renan, "and not literary merit, that constitutes the beautiful." An Homeric poem written to-day, he goes on to say, would not be beautiful, because it would not be true; it would not contain this breath of a living humanity. "It is not Homer who is beautiful, it is the Homeric life." The literary spirit begat Tennyson, begat Browning, begat New England poets, but it did not in the same sense beget Whitman, any more than it begat Homer or Job or Isaiah. The artist may delight in him and find his own ideals there; the critic may study him and find the poet master of all his weapons; the disciple of culture will find, as Professor Triggs has well said, that "there is no body of writings in literature which demands a wider conversancy with the best that has been thought or said in the world," — yet the poet escapes from all hands that would finally hold him and monopolize him. Whitman is an immense solvent, — forms, theories, rules, criticisms, disappear in his fluid, teeming pages. Much can be deduced from him, because much went

to the making up of his point of view. He makes no criticism, yet a far-reaching criticism is implied in the very start of his poems. No modern poet presupposes so much, or requires so much preliminary study and reflection. He brings a multitude of questions and problems, and, what is singular, he brings them in himself; they are implied in his temper, and in his attitude toward life and reality.

Whitman says he has read his "Leaves" to himself in the open air, that he has tried himself by the elemental laws; and tells us in many ways, direct and indirect, that the standards he would be tried by are not those of art or books, but of absolute nature. He has been laughed at for calling himself a "Kosmos," but evidently he uses the term to indicate this elemental, dynamic character of his work, — its escape from indoor, artificial standards, its aspiration after the "amplitude of the earth, and the coarseness and sexuality of the earth, and the great charity of the earth, and the equilibrium also."

II

Unless the poetic perception is fundamental in us, and can grasp the poetry of things, actions, characters, multitudes, heroisms, we shall read Whitman with very poor results. Unless America, the contemporary age, life, nature, are poetical to

us, Whitman will not be. He has aimed at the larger poetry of forces, masses, persons, enthusiasms, rather than at the poetry of the specially rare and fine. He kindles in me the delight I have in space, freedom, power, the elements, the cosmic, democracy, and the great personal qualities of self-reliance, courage, candor, charity.

Always in the literary poets are we impressed with the art of the poet as something distinct from the poet himself, and more or less put on. The poet gets himself up for the occasion; he assumes the pose and the language of the poet, as the priest assumes the pose and the language of devotion. In Whitman the artist and the man are one. He never gets himself up for the occasion. Our pleasure in him is rarely or never our pleasure in the well-dressed, the well-drilled, the cultivated, the refined, the orderly, but it is more akin to our pleasure in real things, in human qualities and powers, in freedom, health, development. Yet I never open his book without being struck afresh with its pictural quality, its grasp of the concrete, its vivid realism, its intimate sense of things, persons, truths, qualities, such as only the greatest artists can give us, and such as we can never get in mere prose. It is as direct as a challenge, as personal as a handshake, and yet withal how mystical, how elusive, how incommensurable! To deny that Whitman belongs to the fraternity of great artists, the shapers

and moulders of the ideal, — those who breathe the breath of life into the clay or stone of common facts and objects, who make all things plastic and the vehicles of great and human emotions, — is to read him very inadequately, to say the least. To get at Walt Whitman you must see through just as much as you do in dealing with nature; you are to bring the same interpretive imagination. You are not to be balked by what appears to be the coarse and the familiar, or by his rank contemporaneity; after a time you will surely see the lambent spiritual flames that play about it all, —

"Prophetic spirit of materials shifting and flickering about me," —

and his cosmic splendor, depth, and power. It is not the denial of art, it is a new affirmation of life. It is one phase of his democracy. It is the logical conclusion of the vestless and coatless portrait of himself that appeared in the first edition of his poems. He would give us more of the man, a fuller measure of personal, concrete, human qualities than any poet before him. He strips away the artificial wrappings and illusions usual in poetry, and relies entirely upon the native and intrinsic. He will have no curtains, he says, — not the finest, — between himself and his reader.

"Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun (there are millions of suns left),
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from yourself."

This is a hint of his democracy as applied to literature, — more direct and immediate contact with the primary and universal, less of the vestments and trappings of art and more of the push and power of original character and of nature.

III

It seems to me it is always in order to protest against the narrow and dogmatic spirit that so often crops out in current criticism touching this matter of art. "The boundaries of art are jealously guarded," says a recent authority, as if art had boundaries like a state or province that had been accurately surveyed and fixed, — as if art was a fact and not a spirit.

Now I shall deny at the outset that there are any bounds of art, or that art is in any sense an "enclosure," — a province fenced off and set apart from the rest, — any more than religion is an enclosure, though so many people would like to make it

so. Art is commensurate with the human spirit. I should even deny that there are any principles of art in the sense that there are principles of mechanics or of mathematics. Art has but one principle, one aim, — to produce an impression, a powerful impression, no matter by what means, or if it be by reversing all the canons of taste and criticism. Name any principle, so called, and some day a genius shall be born who will produce his effects in defiance of it, or by appearing to reverse it. Such a man as Turner seemed, at first sight, to set at defiance all correct notions of art. The same with Wagner in music, the same with Whitman in poetry. The new man is impossible till he appears, and, when he appears, in proportion to his originality and power does it take the world a longer or shorter time to adjust its critical standards to him. But it is sure to do so at last. There is nothing final in art: its principles follow and do not lead the creator; they are deductions from his work, not its inspiration. We demand of the new man, of the overthrower of our idols, but one thing, — has he authentic inspiration and power? If he has not, his pretensions are soon exploded. If he has, we cannot put him down, any more than we can put down a law of nature, and we very soon find some principle of art that fits his case. Is there no room for the new man? But the new man makes room for himself, and if he be of the first order he largely

makes the taste by which he is appreciated, and the rules of art by which he is to be judged.

IV

The trouble with most of us is that we found our taste for poetry upon particular authors, instead of upon literature as a whole, or, better yet, upon life and reality. Hence we form standards instead of principles. Standards are limited, rigid, uncompromising, while principles are flexible, expansive, creative. If we are wedded to the Miltonic standard of poetry, the classic standards, we shall have great difficulties with Whitman; but if we have founded our taste upon natural principles — if we have learned to approach literature through reality, instead of reality through literature — we shall not be the victims of any one style or model; we shall be made free of all. The real test of art, of any art, as Burke long ago said, and as quoted by Mr. Howells in his trenchant little volume called "Criticism and Fiction," is to be sought outside of art, namely, in nature. "I can judge but poorly of anything while I measure it by no other standard than itself. The true standard of the arts is in every man's power; and an easy observation of the most common, sometimes of the meanest, things in nature will give the truest lights." It is thought that the preëminence of the Greek standards is settled when we say they are natural. Yes, but Nature is

not Greek. She is Asiatic, German, English, as well.

V

In poetry, in art, a man must sustain a certain vital relation to his work, and that work must sustain a certain vital relation to the laws of mind and of life. That is all, and that leaves the doors very wide. We are not to ask, Is it like this or like that? but, Is it vital, is it real, is it a consistent, well-organized whole?

The poet must always interpret himself and nature after his own fashion. Is his fashion adequate? Is the interpretation vivid and real? Do his lines cut to the quick, and beget heat and joy in the soul? If we cannot make the poet's ideal our own by sharing his enthusiasm for it, the trouble is as likely to be in ourselves as in him. In any case he must be a law unto himself.

The creative artist differs from the mere writer or thinker in this: he sustains a direct personal relation to his subject through emotion, intuition, will. The indirect, impersonal relation which works by reflection, comparison, and analysis is that of the critic and philosopher. The man is an artist when he gives us a concrete and immediate impression of reality: from his hands we get the thing itself; from the critic and thinker we get ideas *about* the thing. The poet does not merely say the world is beautiful; he shows it as beautiful: he does not

describe the flower; he places it before us. What are the enemies of art? Reflection, didacticism, description, the turgid, the obscure. A poet with a thesis to sustain is more or less barred from the freedom of pure art. It is by direct and unconsidered expression, says Scherer, that art communicates with reality. The things that make for art, then, are feeling, intuition, sentiment, soul, a fresh and vigorous sense of real things, — in fact, all that makes for life, health, and wholeness. Goethe is more truly an artist in the first part of Faust than in the second; Arnold has a more truly artistic mind than Lowell.

The principles of art are always the same in the respect I have indicated, just as the principles of life are always the same, or of health and longevity are always the same. No writer is an artist who is related to his subject simply by mental or logical grip alone: he must have a certain emotional affiliation and identity with it; he does not so much convey to us ideas and principles as pictures, parables, impressions, — a lively sense of real things. When we put Whitman outside the pale of art, we must show his shortcomings here; we must show that he is not fluid and generative, — that he paints instead of interprets, that he gives us reasons instead of impulses, a stone when we ask for bread. "I do not give a little charity," he says; "when I give, I give myself." This the artist always does,

not his mind merely, but his soul, his personality. "Leaves of Grass" is as direct an emanation from a central personal force as any book in literature, and always carries its own test and its own proof. It never hardens into a system, it never ceases to be penetrated with will and emotion, it never declines from the order of deeds to the order of mere thoughts. All is movement, progress, evolution, picture, parable, impulse.

It is on these grounds that Whitman, first of all, is an artist. He has the artist temperament. His whole life was that of a man who lives to ideal ends, — who lives to bestow himself upon others, to extract from life its meaning and its joy.

VI

Whitman has let himself go, and trusted himself to the informal and spontaneous, to a degree unprecedented. His course required a self-reliance of the highest order; it required an innate cohesion and homogeneity, a firmness and consistency of individual outline, that few men have. It would seem to be much easier to face the poet's problem in the old, well-worn forms — forms that are so winsome and authoritative in themselves — than to stand upon a basis so individual and intrinsic as Whitman chose to stand upon. His course goes to the quick at once. How much of a man are you? How vital and fundamental is your

poetic gift? Can it go alone? Can it face us in undress?

Never did the artist more cunningly conceal himself; never did he so completely lose himself in the man, identifying himself with the natural and spontaneous; never emerging and challenging attention on his own account, denying us when we too literally seek him, mocking us when we demand his credentials, and revealing himself only when we have come to him upon his own terms.

The form the poet chose favored this self-revelation; there is nothing, no outside conscious art, to stand between himself and his reader. "This is no book," he says: "who touches this touches a man." In one sense Whitman is without art, — the impression which he always seeks to make is that of reality itself. He aims to give us reality without the usual literary veils and illusions, — the least possible amount of the artificial, the extrinsic, the put-on, between himself and his reader. He banishes from his work, as far as possible, what others are so intent upon, — all atmosphere of books and culture, all air of literary intention and decoration, — and puts his spirit frankly and immediately to his readers. The verse does not seem to have been shaped; it might have grown: it takes no apparent heed of externals, but flows on like a brook, irregular, rhythmical, and always fluid and real. A cry will always be raised against the producer in any

field who discards the authority of the models and falls back upon simple Nature, or upon himself, as Millet did in painting, and Wagner in music, and Whitman in poetry.

Whitman's working ideas, the principles that inspired him, are all directly related to life and the problems of life; they are democracy, nature, freedom, love, personality, religion: while the ideas from which our poets in the main draw their inspiration are related to art, — they are literary ideas, such as lucidity, form, beauty.

VII

Much light is thrown upon Whitman's literary methods and aims by a remark which he once made in conversation with Dr. Bucke: —

"I have aimed to make the book simple, — tasteless, or with little taste, — with very little or no perfume. The usual way is for the poet or writer to put in as much taste, perfume, piquancy, as he can; but this is not the way of nature, which I take for model. Nature presents us her productions — her air, earth, waters, even her flowers, grains, meats — with faint and delicate flavor and fragrance, but these in the long run make the deepest impression. Man, dealing with natural things, constantly aims to increase their piquancy. By crossing and selection he deepens and intensifies the scents and hues of flowers, the tastes of fruits, and so on. He pur-

sues the same method in poetry, — that is, strives for strong light or shade, for high color, perfume, pungency, in all ways for the greatest immediate effect. In so doing he leaves the true way, the way of Nature, and, in the long run, comes far short of producing her effects."

More light of the same kind is thrown upon his methods by the following passage from the preface to the first edition of his poems in 1855.

"To speak in literature," he says, "with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art." And again: "The great poet has less a marked style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome; I will not have in my writing any elegance, or effect, or originality, to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell, I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe, I will have purpose, as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me."

VIII

But in view of the profound impression Whitman's work has made upon widely different types of mind on both sides of the Atlantic, and in view of the persistent vitality of his fame, the question whether he is inside or outside the pale of art amounts to very little. I quite agree with the late Mrs. Gilchrist, that, when "great meanings and great emotions are expressed with corresponding power, literature has done its best, call it what you please."

That Whitman has expressed great meanings and great emotions with adequate power, even his unfriendly critics admit. Thus Professor Wendell, in an admirable essay on American literature, says that "though Whitman is uncouth, inarticulate, and lacking in a grotesque degree artistic form, yet for all that he can make you feel for the moment how even the ferry-boats plying from New York to Brooklyn are fragments of God's eternities." In the same way Mr. William Clark, his British critic and expounder, says that he is wanting in discrimination and art, "flings his ideas at us in a heap," etc., and yet that the effect of his work is "to stir our emotions, widen our interests, and rally the forces of our moral nature."

It seems to me that a man who, through the printed page, can do these things, must have some

kind of art worth considering. If, through his impassioned treatment of a prosy, commonplace object like a ferry-boat, he can so dignify and exalt it, and so fill it with the meanings of the spirit, that it seems like a part of God's eternities, his methods are at least worth inquiring into.

The truth is, Whitman's art, in its lack of extrinsic form and finish, is Oriental rather than Occidental, and is an offense to a taste founded upon the precision and finish of a mechanical age. His verse is like the irregular, slightly rude coin of the Greeks compared with the exact, machine-cut dies of our own day, or like the unfinished look of Japanese pottery beside the less beautiful but more perfect specimens of modern ceramic art.

For present purposes, we may say there are two phases of art, — formal art and creative art. By formal art I mean that which makes a direct appeal to our sense of form, — our sense of the finely carved, the highly wrought, the deftly planned; and by creative art I mean that quickening, fructifying power of the masters, that heat and passion that make the world plastic and submissive to their hands, teeming with new meanings and thrilling with new life.

Formal art is always in the ascendant. Formal anything — formal dress, formal manners, formal religion, formal this and that — always counts for

more than the informal, the spontaneous, the original. It is easier, it can be put off and on.

Formal art is nearly always the gift of the minor poet, and often of the major poet also. In such a poet as Swinburne, formal art leads by a great way. The content of his verse, — what is it? In Tennyson as well I should say formal art is in the ascendant. Creative art is his also; Tennyson reaches and moves the spirit, yet his skill is more noteworthy than his power. In Wordsworth, on the other hand, I should say creative art led: the content of his verse is more than its form; his spiritual and religious values are greater than his literary and artistic. The same is true of our own Emerson. Poe, again, is much more as an artist than as a man or a personality.

I hardly need say that in Whitman formal art, the ostensibly artistic, counts for but very little. The intentional artist, the professional poet, is kept entirely in abeyance, or is completely merged and hidden in the man, more so undoubtedly than in any poet this side the old Oriental bards. We call him formless, chaotic, amorphous, etc., because he makes no appeal to our modern highly stimulated sense of art or artificial form. We must discriminate this from our sense of power, our sense of life, our sense of beauty, of the sublime, of the all, which clearly Whitman would reach and move. Whitman certainly has a form of his own: what

would a poet, or any writer or worker in the ideal, do without some kind of form? some consistent and adequate vehicle of expression? But Whitman's form is not what is called artistic, because it is not brought within the rules of the prosodical system, and does not appeal to our sense of the consciously shaped and cultivated. It is essentially the prose form heightened and intensified by a deep, strong, lyric, and prophetic note.

The bonds and shackles of regular verse-form Whitman threw off. This course seemed to be demanded by the spirit to which he had dedicated himself, — the spirit of absolute unconstraint. The restrictions and hamperings of the scholastic forms did not seem to be consistent with this spirit, which he identified with democracy and the New World. A poet who sets out to let down the bars everywhere, to remove veils and obstructions, to emulate the freedom of the elemental forces, to effuse always the atmosphere of open-air growths and objects, to be as "regardless of observation" as the processes of nature, will not be apt to take kindly to any arbitrary and artificial form of expression. The essentially prose form which Whitman chose is far more in keeping with the spirit and aim of his work than any conventional metrical system could have been. Had he wrought solely as a conscious artist, aiming at the effect of finely chiseled forms, he would doubtless have chosen a different medium.

IX

Whitman threw himself with love and enthusiasm upon this great, crude, seething, materialistic American world. The question is, Did he master it? Is he adequate to absorb and digest it? Does he make man-stuff of it? Is it plastic in his hands? Does he stamp it with his own image? I do not ask, Does he work it up into what are called artistic forms? Does he make it the quarry from which he carves statues or builds temples? because evidently he does not do this, or assume to do it. He is content if he presents America and the modern to us as they are inwrought into his own personality, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, or as character, passion, will, motive, conviction. He would show them subjectively and as living impulses in himself. Of course a great constructive, dramatic poet like Shakespeare would have solved his problem in a different manner, or through the objective, artistic portrayal of types and characters. But the poet and prophet of democracy and of egotism shows us all things in and through himself.

His egotism, or egocentric method, is the fundamental fact about his work. It colors all and determines all. The poems are the direct outgrowth of the personality of the poet; they are born directly upon the ego, as it were, like the fruit of that tropical tree which grows immediately upon the

trunk. His work is nearer his radical, primary self than that of most poets. He never leads us away from himself into pleasant paths with enticing flowers of fancy or forms of art. He carves or shapes nothing for its own sake; there is little in the work that can stand on independent grounds as pure art. His work is not material made precious by elaboration and finish, but by its relation to himself and to the sources of life.

X

Whitman was compelled to this negation of extrinsic art by the problem he had set before himself, — first, to arouse, to suggest, rather than to finish or elaborate, less to display any theme or thought than "to bring the reader into the atmosphere of the theme or thought;" secondly, to make his own personality the chief factor in the volume, or present it so that the dominant impression should always be that of the living, breathing man as we meet him and see him and feel him in life, and never as we see him and feel him in books or art, — the man in the form and garb of actual, concrete life, not as poet or artist, but simply as man. This is doubtless the meaning of the vestless and coatless portrait of himself prefixed to the first issue of the "Leaves," to which I have referred. This portrait is symbolical of the whole attitude of the poet toward his task. It was a hint that we must take this poet with

very little literary tailoring; it was a hint that he belonged to the open air, and came of the people and spoke in their spirit.

It is never the theme treated, but always the character exploited; never the structure finished, but always the plan suggested; never the work accomplished, but always the impulse imparted, — freedom, power, growth.

"Allons! we must not stop here.
However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient
this dwelling, we cannot remain here,
However sheltered this port, or however calm these waters,
we must not anchor here,
However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us we are
permitted to receive it but a little while.

"Allons! With power, liberty, the earth, the elements!
Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity;
Allons! from all formulas!
From your formulas, O bat-eyed and materialistic priests!"

This magnificent poem, "The Song of the Open Road," is one of the most significant in Whitman's work. He takes the open road as his type, — not an end in itself, not a fulfillment, but a start, a journey, a progression. It teaches him the profound lesson of reception, "no preference nor denial," and the profounder lesson of liberty and truth: —

"From this hour, freedom!
From this hour I ordain myself loosed of limits and imaginary lines,
Going where I list — my own master, total and absolute,
Listening to others, and considering well what they say,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating,
Gently, but with undeniable will, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.

"I inhale great draughts of air,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine."

He will not rest with art, he will not rest with books, he will press his way steadily toward the largest freedom.

"Only the kernel of every object nourishes.
Where is he who tears off the husks for you and me?
Where is he who undoes stratagems and envelopes for you and me?"

Whitman was not a builder. If he had the architectural power which the great poets have shown, he gave little proof of it. It was not required by the task he set before himself. His book is not a temple: it is a wood, a field, a highway; vista, vista, everywhere, — vanishing lights and shades, truths half disclosed, successions of objects, hints, suggestions, brief pictures, groups, voices, contrasts, blendings, and, above all, the tonic quality of the open air.

The shorter poems are like bunches of herbs or leaves, or a handful of sprays gathered in a walk; never a thought carefully carved, and appealing to our sense of artistic form.

The main poem of the book, "The Song of Myself," is a series of utterances, ejaculations, apostrophes, enumerations, associations, pictures, parables, incidents, suggestions, with little or no structural or logical connection, but all emanating from a personality whose presence dominates the page, and whose eye is ever upon us. Without this vivid and intimate sense of the man back of all, of a sane and powerful spirit sustaining ours, the piece would be wild and inchoate.

XI

The reader will be sure to demand of Whitman ample compensation for the absence from his work of those things which current poets give us in such full measure. Whether or not the compensation is ample, whether the music of his verse as of winds and waves, the long, irregular dithyrambic movement, its fluid and tonic character, the vastness of conception, the large, biblical speech, the surging cosmic emotion, the vivid personal presence as of the living man looking into your eye or walking by your side, — whether all these things, the refreshing quality as of "harsh salt spray" which the poet Lanier found in the "Leaves," the electric

currents which Mrs. Gilchrist found there, the "unexcelled imaginative justice of language" which Mr. Stevenson at times found, the religious liberation and faith which Mr. Symonds found, the "incomparable things incomparably well said" of Emerson, the rifle bullets of Ruskin, the "supreme words" of Colonel Ingersoll, etc., — whether qualities and effects like these, I say, make up to us for the absence of the traditional poetic graces and adornments is a question which will undoubtedly long divide the reading world.

In the works upon which our poetic taste is founded, artistic form is paramount; we have never been led to apply to such works open-air standards, — clouds, trees, rivers, spaces, — but the precision and definiteness of the cultured and the artificial. If Whitman had aimed at pure art and had failed, his work would be intolerable. As his French critic, Gabriel Sarrazin, has well said: "In the large work which Whitman attempted, there come no rules save those of nobility and strength of spirit; and these suffice amply to create a most unlooked-for and grandiose aspect of beauty." "Overcrowded and disorderly" as it may seem, "if heroic emotion and thought and enthusiasm vitalize it," the poet has reached his goal.

XII

Sometimes I define Whitman to myself as the poet of the open air, — not because he sings the

praises of these things after the manner of the so-called nature-poets, but because he has the quality of things in the open air, the quality of the unhoused, the untamed, the elemental and aboriginal. He pleases and he offends, the same way things at large do. He has the brawn, the indifference, the rudeness, the virility, the coarseness, — something gray, unpronounced, elemental, about him, the effect of mass, size, distance, flowing, vanishing lines, neutral spaces, — something informal, multitudinous, and processional, — something regardless of criticism, that makes no bid for our applause, not calculated instantly to please, unmindful of details, prosaic if we make it so, common, near at hand, and yet that provokes thought and stirs our emotions in an unusual degree. The long lists and catalogues of objects and scenes in Whitman, that have so excited the mirth of the critics, are one phase of his out-of-doors character, — a multitude of concrete objects, a grove, a thicket, a field, a stretch of beach, — every object sharply defined, but no attempt at logical or artistic sequence, the effect of the whole informal, multitudinous. It may be objected to these pages that they consist of a mass of details that do not make a picture. But every line is a picture of a scene or an object. Whitman always keeps up the movement, he never pauses to describe; it is all action.

Passing from such a poet as Tennyson to Whitman is like going from a warm, perfumed interior,

with rich hangings, pictures, books, statuary, fine men and women, out into the street, or upon the beach, or upon the hill, or under the midnight stars. We lose something certainly, but do we not gain something also? Do we not gain just what Whitman had in view, namely, direct contact with the elements in which are the sources of our life and health? Do we not gain in scope and power what we lose in art and refinement?

The title, "Leaves of Grass," is full of meaning. What self-knowledge and self-scrutiny it implies! The grass, perennially sprouting, universal, formless, common, the always spread feast of the herds, dotted with flowers, the herbage of the earth, so suggestive of the multitudinous, loosely aggregated, unelaborated character of the book; the lines springing directly out of the personality of the poet, the soil of his life.

"What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest is me,"

says the poet, and this turns out to be the case. We only look to see if in the common and the cheap he discloses new values and new meanings, — if his leaves of grass have the old freshness and nutriment, and be not a mere painted greenness.

"The pure contralto sings in the organ loft,
The carpenter dresses his plank — the tongue of his foreplane whistles its wild ascending lisp,

The married and unmarried children ride home to their Thanksgiving dinner,
The pilot seizes the king-pin — he heaves down with a strong arm,
The mate stands braced in the whale-boat — lance and harpoon are ready,
The duck-shooter walks by silent and cautious stretches,
The deacons are ordained with crossed hands at the altar,
The spinning-girl retreats and advances to the hum of the big wheel,
The farmer stops by the bars, as he walks on a First Day loafe, and looks at the oats and rye,
The lunatic is carried at last to the asylum, a confirmed case,
He will never sleep any more as he did in the cot in his mother's bedroom;
The jour printer with gray head and gaunt jaws works at his case,
He turns his quid of tobacco, while his eyes blurr with the manuscript;
The malformed limbs are tied to the anatomist's table,
What is removed drops horribly in a pail;
The quadroon girl is sold at the stand — the drunkard nods by the bar-room stove,
The machinist rolls up his sleeves — the policeman travels his beat — the gate-keeper marks who pass,
The young fellow drives the express-wagon — I love him, though I do not know him,
The half-breed straps on his light boots to compete in the race,

The western turkey-shooting draws old and young—
some lean on their rifles, some sit on logs,
Out from the crowd steps the marksman, takes his position, levels his piece;
The groups of newly-come emigrants cover the wharf or levee,
As the woolly-pates hoe in the sugar-field, the overseer views them from his saddle,
The bugle calls in the ball-room, the gentlemen run for their partners, the dancers bow to each other,
The youth lies awake in the cedar-roofed garret, and harks to the musical rain,
The Wolverine sets traps on the creek that helps fill the Huron,
The reformer ascends the platform, he spouts with his mouth and nose,

. . . . . .

Seasons pursuing each other, the plougher ploughs, the mower mows, and the winter-grain falls in the ground,
Off on the lakes the pike-fisher watches and waits by the hole in the frozen surface,
The stumps stand thick round the clearing, the squatter strikes deep with his axe,
Flatboatmen make fast, towards dusk, near the cottonwood or pekan-trees,
Coon-seekers go through the regions of the Red River, or through those drained by the Tennessee, or through those of the Arkansas,

Torches shine in the dark that hangs on the Chattahooche
or Altamahaw,
Patriarchs sit at supper with sons and grandsons and great-
grandsons around them,
In walls of adobe, in canvas tents, rest hunters and trap-
pers after their day's sport,
The city sleeps and the country sleeps,
The living sleep for their time, the dead sleep for their
time,
The old husband sleeps by his wife, and the young hus-
band sleeps by his wife;
And these one and all tend inward to me, and I tend out-
ward to them,
And such as it is to be of these, more or less, I am."

What is this but tufts and tussocks of grass; not branching trees, nor yet something framed and deftly put together, but a succession of simple things, objects, actions, persons; handfuls of native growths, a stretch of prairie or savanna; no composition, no artistic wholes, no logical sequence, yet all vital and real; jets of warm life that shoot and play over the surface of contemporary America, and that the poet uses as the stuff out of which to weave the song of himself.

This simple aggregating or cataloguing style as it has been called, and which often occurs in the "Leaves," has been much criticised, but it seems to me in perfect keeping in a work that does not aim at total artistic effects, at finished structural perfec-

tion like architecture, but to picture the elements of a man's life and character in outward scenes and objects and to show how all nature tends inward to him and he outward to it. Whitman showers the elements of American life upon his reader until, so to speak, his mind is drenched with them, but never groups them into patterns to tickle his sense of form. It is charged that his method is inartistic, and it is so in a sense, but it is the Whitman art and has its own value in his work. Only the artist instinct could prompt to this succession of one line genre word painting.

But this is not the way of the great artists. No, but it is Whitman's way, and these things have a certain artistic value in his work, a work that professedly aims to typify his country and times, — the value of multitude, processions, mass-movements, and the gathering together of elements and forces from wide areas.

XIII

Whitman's relation to art, then, is primary and fundamental, just as his relations to religion, to culture, to politics, to democracy, are primary and fundamental, — through his emotion, his soul, and not merely through his tools, his intellect. His artistic conscience is quickly revealed to any searching inquiry. It is seen in his purpose to convey his message by suggestion and indirection, or as

an informing, vitalizing breath and spirit. His thought and meaning are enveloped in his crowded, concrete, and often turbulent pages, as science is enveloped in nature. He has a profound ethic, a profound metaphysic, but they are not formulated; they are vital in his pages as hearing or eyesight.

Whitman studied effects, and shaped his means to his end, weighing values and subordinating parts, as only the great artist does. He knew the power of words as few know them; he knew the value of vista, perspective, vanishing lights and lines. He knew how to make his words itch at your ears till you understood them; how to fold up and put away in his sentences meanings, glimpses, that did not at first reveal themselves. It is only the work of the great creative artist that is pervaded by will, and that emanates directly and inevitably from the personality of the man himself. As a man and an American, Whitman is as closely related to his work as Æschylus to his, or Dante to his. This is always a supreme test, — the closeness and vitality of the relation of a man to his work. Could any one else have done it? Is it the general intelligence that speaks, the culture and refinement of the age? or have we a new revelation of life, a new mind and soul? The lesser poets sustain only a secondary relation to their works. It is other poets, other experiences, the past, the schools, the forms, that

speak through them. In all Whitman's recitatives, as he calls them, the free-flowing ends of the sentences, the loose threads of meaning, the unraveled or unknitted threads and fringes, are all well considered, and are one phase of *his* art. He seeks his effects thus.

His method is indirect, allegorical, and elliptical to an unusual degree; often a curious suspension and withholding in a statement, a suggestive incompleteness, both ends of his thought, as it were, left in the air; sometimes the substantive, sometimes the nominative, is wanting, and all for a purpose. The poet somewhere speaks of his utterance as "prophetic screams." The prophetic element is rarely absent, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, only it is a more jocund and reassuring cry than we are used to in prophecy. The forthrightness of utterance, the projectile force of expression, the constant appeal to unseen laws and powers of the great prophetic souls, is here.

Whitman is poetic in the same way in which he is democratic, in the same way in which he is religious, or American, or modern, — not by word merely, but by deed; not by the extrinsic, but by the intrinsic; not by art, but by life.

I am never tired of saying that to put great personal qualities in a poem, or other literary work, not formulated or didactically stated, but in tone, manner, attitude, breadth of view, love, charity, good

fellowship, etc., is the great triumph for our day. So put, they are a possession to the race forever; they grow and bear fruit perennially, like the grass and the trees. And shall it be said that the poet who does this has no worthy art?

XIV

Nearly all modern artificial products, when compared with the ancient, are characterized by greater mechanical finish and precision. Can we say, therefore, they are more artistic? Is a gold coin of the time of Pericles, so rude and simple, less artistic than the elaborate coins of our own day? Is Japanese pottery, the glazing often ragged and uneven, less artistic than the highly finished work of the moderns?

Are we quite sure, after all, that what we call "artistic form" is in any high or fundamental sense artistic? Are the precise, the regular, the measured, the finished, the symmetrical, indispensable to our conception of art? If regular extrinsic form and measure and proportion are necessary elements of the artistic, then geometrical flower-beds, and trees set in rows or trained to some fancy pattern, ought to please the artist. But do they? If we look for the artistic in these things, then Addison is a greater artist than Shakespeare. Dr. Johnson says, "Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare of men." Which is really the most artistic?

The one is the coin from the die, the other the coin from the hand.

Tennyson's faultless form and finish are not what stamp him a great artist. He would no doubt be glad to get rid of them if he could, at least to keep them in abeyance and make them less obtrusive; he would give anything for the freedom, raciness, and wildness of Shakespeare. But he is not equal to these things. The culture, the refinement, the precision of a correct and mechanical age have sunk too deeply into his soul. He has not the courage or the spring to let himself go as Shakespeare did. Tennyson, too, speaks the language of poets, and not of men; he savors of the flower-garden, and not of the forest. Tennyson knows that he is an artist. Shakespeare, apparently, never had such a thought; he is intent solely upon holding the mirror up to nature. Tennyson lived in an age of criticism, and when the poets loved poetry more than they did life and things; Shakespeare, in a more virile time, and in "the full stream of the world."

"Leaves of Grass" is not self-advertised as a work of art. The author had no thought that you should lay down his book and say, "What a great artist!" "What a master workman!" He would rather you should say, "What a great man!" "What a loving comrade!" "What a real democrat!" "What a healing and helpful force!" He would not have you admire his poetry: he would have you

filled with the breath of a new and larger and saner life; he would be a teacher and trainer of men.

The love of the precise, the exact, the methodical, is characteristic of an age of machinery, of a commercial and industrial age like ours. These things are indispensable in the mill and counting-house, but why should we insist upon them in poetry? Why should we cling to an arbitrary form like the sonnet? Why should we insist upon a perfect rhyme, as if it was a cog in a wheel? Why not allow and even welcome the freedom of half-rhymes, or suggestive rhymes? Why, anyway, fold back a sentence or idea to get it into a prescribed arbitrary form? Why should we call this verse-tinkering and verse-shaping art, when it is only artifice? Why should we call the man who makes one pretty conceit rhyme with another pretty conceit an artist, and deny the term to the man whose sentences pair with great laws and forces?

Of course it is much easier for a poet to use the regular verse forms and verse language than it is to dispense with them; that is, a much less poetic capital is required in the former case than in the latter. The stock forms and the stock language count for a good deal. A very small amount of original talent may cut quite an imposing figure in the robes of the great masters. Require the poet to divest himself of them, and to speak in the language of men and in the spirit of real things, and see how he fares.

XV

Whitman was afraid of what he called the beauty disease. He thought a poet of the first order should be sparing of the direct use of the beautiful, as Nature herself is. His aim should be larger, and beauty should follow and not lead. The poet should not say to himself, "Come, I will make something beautiful," but rather "I will make something true, and quickening, and powerful. I will not dress my verse up in fine words and pretty fancies, but I will breathe into it the grit and force and adhesiveness of real things." Beauty is the flowering of life and fecundity, and it must have deep root in the non-beautiful.

Beauty, as the master knows it, is a spirit and not an adornment. It is not merely akin to flowers and gems and rainbows: it is akin to the All. Looking through his eyes, you shall see it in the rude and the savage also, in rocks and deserts and mountains, in the common as well as in the rare, in wrinkled age as well as in rosy youth.

The non-beautiful holds the world together, holds life together and nourishes it, more than the beautiful. Nature is beautiful because she is so much else first, — yes, and last, and all the time.

"For the roughness of the earth and of man encloses as much as the delicates of the earth and of man,
And nothing endures but personal qualities."

Is there not in field, wood, or shore something more precious and tonic than any special beauties we may chance to find there, — flowers, perfumes, sunsets, — something that we cannot do without, though we can do without these? Is it health, life, power, or what is it?

Whatever it is, it is something analogous to this that we get in Whitman. There is little in his "Leaves" that one would care to quote for its mere beauty, though this element is there also. One may pluck a flower here and there in his rugged landscape, as in any other; but the flowers are always by the way, and never the main matter. We should not miss them if they were not there. What delights and invigorates us is in the air, and in the look of things. The flowers are like our wild blossoms growing under great trees or amid rocks, never the camellia or tuberose of the garden or hothouse, — something rude and bracing is always present, always a breath of the untamed and aboriginal.

Whitman's work gives results, and never processes. There is no return of the mind upon itself; it descends constantly upon things, persons, realities. It is a rushing stream which will not stop to be analyzed. It has been urged that Whitman does not give the purely intellectual satisfaction that would seem to be warranted by his mental grasp and penetration. No, nor the æsthetic satisfaction

warranted by his essentially artistic habit of mind. Well, he did not promise satisfaction in anything, but only to put us on the road to satisfaction. His book, he says, is not a "good lesson," but it lets down the bars to a good lesson, and that to another, and every one to another still.

Let me repeat that the sharp, distinct intellectual note — the note of culture, books, clubs, etc., such as we get from so many modern writers, you will not get from Whitman. In my opinion, the note he sounds is deeper and better than that. It has been charged by an unfriendly critic that he strikes lower than the intellect. If it is meant by this that he misses the intellect, it is not true; he stimulates the intellect as few poets do. He strikes lower because he strikes farther. He sounds the note of character, personality, volition, the note of prophecy, of democracy, and of love. He seems unintellectual to an abnormally intellectual age; he seems unpoetic to a taste formed upon poetic tidbits; he seems irreligious to standards founded upon the old models of devotional piety; he seems disorderly, incoherent to all petty thumb and finger measurements. In his ideas and convictions, Whitman was a modern of the moderns; yet in his type, his tastes, his fundamental make-up, he was primitive, of an earlier race and age, — before, as Emerson suggests, the gods had cut Man up into men, with special talents of one kind or another.

XVI

Take any of Whitman's irregular-flowing lines, and clip and trim them, and compress them into artificial verse forms, and what have we gained to make up for what we have lost? Take his lines called "Reconciliation," for instance: —

"Word over all beautiful as the sky.
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead;
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin — I draw near,
Bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin."

Or take his poem called "Old Ireland:" —

"Far hence amid an isle of wondrous beauty,
Crouching over a grave an ancient sorrowful mother,
Once a queen, now lean and tatter'd, seated on the ground,
Her old white hair drooping, dishevel'd, round her shoulders,
At her feet fallen an unused royal harp,
Long silent, she, too, long silent, mourning her shrouded hope and heir,
Of all the earth her heart most full of sorrow because most full of love.

"Yet a word, ancient mother,
You need crouch there no longer on the cold ground with forehead between your knees,
Oh, you need not sit there veil'd in your old white hair so dishevel'd,
For know you the one you mourn is not in that grave,
It was an illusion; the son you loved was not really dead,
The Lord is not dead, he is risen again young and strong in another country.
Even while you wept there by your fallen harp by the grave,
What you wept for was translated, pass'd from the grave,
The winds favor'd and the sea sail'd it,
And now with rosy and new blood,
Moves to-day in a new country."

Or take these lines from "Children of Adam:" —

"I heard you solemn-sweet pipes of the organ as last Sunday morn I pass'd the church,
Winds of autumn, as I walk'd the woods at dusk I heard your long-stretch'd sighs up above so mournful,
I heard the perfect Italian tenor singing at the opera, I heard the soprano in the midst of the quartet singing;
Heart of my love! you, too, I heard murmuring low through one of the wrists around my head,
Heard the pulse of you, when all was still, ringing little bells last night under my ear."

Put such things as these, or in fact any of the poems, in rhymed and measured verse, and you heighten a

certain effect, the effect of the highly wrought, the cunningly devised; but we lose just what the poet wanted to preserve at all hazards, — vista, unconstraint, the effect of the free-careering forces of nature.

I always think of a regulation verse form as a kind of corset which does not much disguise a good figure, though it certainly hampers it, and which is a great help to a poor figure. It covers up deficiencies, and it restrains exuberances. A personality like Whitman can wear it with ease and grace, as may be seen in a few of his minor poems, but for my part I like him best without it.

XVII

How well we know the language of the conventional poetic! In this language, the language of nine tenths of current poetry, the wind comes up out of the south and kisses the rose's crimson mouth, or it comes out of the wood and rumples the poppy's hood. Morning comes in glistening sandals, and her footsteps are jeweled with flowers. Everything is bedecked and bejeweled. Nothing is truly seen or truly reported. It is an attempt to paint the world beautiful. It is not beautiful as it is, and we must deck it out in the colors of the fancy. Now, I do not want the world painted for me. I want the grass green or brown, as the case may be; the sky blue, the rocks gray, the soil red;

and that the sun should rise and set without any poetic claptrap. What I want is to see these things spin around a thought, or float on the current of an emotion, as they always do in real poetry.

Beauty always follows, never leads the great poet. It arises out of the interior substance and structure of his work, like the bloom of health in the cheeks. The young poet thinks to win Beauty by direct and persistent wooing of her. He has not learned yet that she comes unsought to the truthful, the brave, the heroic. Let him think some great thought, experience some noble impulse, give himself with love to life and reality about him, and Beauty is already his. She is the reward of noble deeds.

XVIII

The modern standard in art is becoming more and more what has been called the canon of the characteristic, as distinguished from the Greek or classic canon of formal beauty. It is this canon, as Professor Triggs suggests, that we are to apply to Whitman. Dr. Johnson had it in mind when he wrote thus of Shakespeare: —

"The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades and scented with flowers: the composition of Shakespeare is a forest in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and bram-

bles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity."

Classic art holds to certain fixed standards; it seeks formal beauty; it holds to order and proportion in external parts; its ideal of natural beauty is the well-ordered park or grove or flower-garden. It has a horror of the wild and savage. Mountains and forests, and tempests and seas, filled the classic mind with terror. Not so with the modern romantic mind, which finds its best stimulus and delight in free, unhampered nature. It loves the element of mystery and the suggestion of uncontrollable power. The modern mind has a sense of the vast, the infinite, that the Greek had not, and it is drawn by informal beauty more than by the formal.

XIX

It is urged against Whitman that he brings us the materials of poetry, but not poetry: he brings us the marble block, but not the statue; or he brings us the brick and mortar, but not the house. False or superficial analogies mislead us. Poetry is not something made; it is something grown, it is a vital union of the fact and the spirit. If the verse awakens in us the poetic thrill, the material, whatever it be, must have been touched with the transforming spirit of poesy. Why does Whitman s material suggest to any reader that it is poetic ma-

terial? Because it has already been breathed upon by the poetic spirit. A poet may bring the raw material of poetry in the sense that he may bring the raw material of a gold coin; the stamp and form you give it does not add to its value. It is doubtful if any of Whitman's utterances could be worked up into what is called poetry without a distinct loss of poetic value. What they would gain in finish they would lose in suggestiveness. This word "suggestiveness" affords one of the keys to Whitman. The objection to him I have been considering arises from the failure of the critic to see and appreciate his avowed purpose to make his page fruitful in poetic suggestion, rather than in samples of poetic elaboration. "I finish no specimens," he says. "I shower them by exhaustless laws, fresh and modern continually, as Nature does." He is quite content if he awaken the poetic emotion without at all satisfying it. He would have you more eager and hungry for poetry when you had finished with him than when you began. He brings the poetic stimulus, and brings it in fuller measure than any contemporary poet; and this is enough for him.

An eminent musician and composer, the late Dr. Ritter, told me that reading "Leaves of Grass" excited him to composition as no other poetry did. Tennyson left him passive and cold, but Whitman set his fingers in motion at once; he was so fruitful in themes, so suggestive of new harmonies and

melodies. He gave the hints, and left his reader to follow them up. This is exactly what Whitman wanted to do. It defines his attitude toward poetry, toward philosophy, toward religion, — to suggest and set going, to arouse unanswerable questions, and to brace you to meet them; to bring the materials of poetry, if you will have it so, and leave you to make the poem; to start trains of thought, and leave you to pursue the flight alone. Not a thinker, several critics have urged; no, but the cause of thought in others to an unwonted degree. "Whether you agree with him or not," says an Australian essayist, "he will sting you into such an anguish of thought as must in the end be beneficial." It matters little to him whether or not you agree with him; what is important is, that you should think the matter out for yourself. He purposely avoids hemming you in by his conclusions; he would lead you in no direction but your own. "Once more I charge you give play to your self. I charge you leave all free, as I have left all free."

No thought, no philosophy, no music, no poetry, in his pages; no, it is all character, impulse, emotion, suggestion. But the true reader of him experiences all these things: he finds in his pages, if he knows how to look for it, a profound metaphysic, a profound ethic, a profound æsthetic; a theory of art and poetry which is never stated, but only hinted or suggested, and which is much more robust

and vital than what we are used to; a theory of good and evil ; a view of character and conduct; a theory of the state and of politics, of the relation of the sexes, etc., to give ample food for thought and speculation. The Hegelian philosophy is in the "Leaves" as vital as the red corpuscles in the blood, so much is implied that is not stated, but only suggested, as in Nature herself. The really vast erudition of the work is adroitly concealed, hidden like its philosophy, as a tree hides its roots. Readers should not need to be told that, in the region of art as of religion, mentality is not first, but spirituality, personality, imagination; and that we do not expect a poet's thoughts to lie upon his pages like boulders in the field, but rather to show their presence like elements in the soil.

"Love-buds, put before you and within you, whoever you
are,
Buds to be unfolded on the old terms,
If you bring the warmth of the sun to them, they will open,
and bring form, color, perfume to you,
If you become the aliment and the wet, they will become
flowers, fruits, tall branches and trees."

The early records and sacred books of most peoples contain what is called the materials of poetry. The Bible is full of such materials. English literature shows many attempts to work this material up into poetry, but always with a distinct loss of poetic

value. The gold is simply beaten out thin and made to cover more surface, or it is mixed with some base metal. A recent English poet has attempted to work up the New Testament records into poetry, and the result is for the most part a thin, windy dilution of the original. If the record or legend is full of poetic suggestion, that is enough; to elaborate it, and deck it out in poetic finery without loss of poetic value, is next to impossible.

To me the Arthurian legends as they are given in the old books are more poetic, more stimulating to the imagination, than they are after they have gone through the verbal upholstering and polishing of such a poet as Swinburne or even Tennyson. These poets add little but words and flowers of fancy, and the heroic simplicity of the original is quite destroyed.

XX

No critic of repute has been more puzzled and misled by this unwrought character of our poet's verse than Mr. Edmund Gosse, the London poet and essayist. Mr. Gosse finds Whitman only a potential or possible poet; his work is literature in the condition of protoplasm. He is a maker of poems in solution; the structural change which should have crystallized his fluid and teeming pages into forms of art never came. It does not occur to Mr. Gosse to inquire whether or not something like this may not have been the poet's intention. Perhaps

this is the secret of the vitality of his work, which, as Mr. Gosse says, now, after forty years, shows no sign of declining. Perhaps it was a large, fresh supply of poetic yeast that the poet really sought to bring us. Undoubtedly Whitman aimed to give his work just this fluid, generative quality, to put into it the very basic elements of life itself. He feared the "structural change" to which Mr. Gosse refers; he knew it was more or less a change from life to death: the cell and not the crystal; the leaf of grass, and not the gem, is the type of his sentences. He sacrificed fixed form; above all, did he stop short of that conscious intellectual elaboration so characteristic of later poetry, the better to give the impression and the stimulus of creative elemental power. It is not to the point to urge that this is not the method or aim of other poets; that others have used the fixed forms, and found them plastic and vital in their hands. It was Whitman's aim; these were the effects he sought. I think beyond doubt that he gives us the impression of something dynamic, something akin to the vital forces of the organic world, much more distinctly and fully than any other poet who has lived.

Whitman always aimed to make his reader an active partner with him in his poetic enterprise. "I seek less," he says, "to state or display any theme or thought, and more to bring you, reader, into the atmosphere of the theme or thought, there to pur-

sue your own flight." This trait is brought out by Mr. Gosse in a little allegory. "Every reader who comes to Whitman," he says, "starts upon an expedition to the virgin forest. He must take his conveniences with him. He will make of the excursion what his own spirit dictates. [We generally do, in such cases, Mr. Gosse.] There are solitudes, fresh air, rough landscape, and a well of water, but if he wishes to enjoy the latter he must bring his own cup with him." This phase of Whitman's work has never been more clearly defined. Mr. Gosse utters it as an adverse criticism. It is true exposition, however we take it, what we get out of Whitman depends so largely upon what we bring to him. Readers will not all get the same. We do not all get the same out of a walk or a mountain climb. We get out of him in proportion to the sympathetic and interpretative power of our own spirits. Have you the brooding, warming, vivifying mother-mind? That vague, elusive, incommensurable something in the "Leaves" that led Symonds to say that talking about Whitman was like talking about the universe, — that seems to challenge our pursuit and definition, that takes on so many different aspects to so many different minds, — it seems to be this that has led Mr. Gosse to persuade himself that there is no real Walt Whitman, no man whom we can take, as we take any other figure in literature, as an "entity of positive value and definite characteristics," but a mere mass

of literary protoplasm that takes the instant impression of whatever mood approaches it. Stevenson finds a Stevenson in it, Mr. Symonds finds a Symonds, Emerson finds an Emerson, etc. Truly may our poet say, "I contain multitudes." In what other poet do these men, or others like them, find themselves?

Whitman was a powerful solvent undoubtedly. He never hardens into anything like a system, or into mere intellectual propositions. One of his own phrases, "the fluid and swallowing soul," is descriptive of this trait of him. One source of his charm is, that we each see some phase of ourselves in him, as Mr. Gosse suggests. Above all things is he potential and indicative, bard of "flowing mouth and indicative hand." In his "Inscriptions" he says: —

"I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a casual look upon you and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you."

This withholding and half-averted glancing, then, on the part of the poet, is deliberate and enters into the scheme of the work. Mr. Gosse would have shown himself a sounder critic had he penetrated the poet's purpose in this respect, and shown whether or not he had violated the canons he had

set up for his own guidance. We do not condemn a creative work when it departs from some rule or precedent, but when it violates its own principle, when it is not consistent with itself, when it hath not eyes to see, or ears to hear, or hands to reach what lies within its own sphere. Art, in the plastic realms of written language, may set its mind upon elaboration, upon structural finish and proportion, upon exact forms and compensations, as in architecture, or it may set its mind upon suggestion, indirection, and the flowing, changing forms of organic nature. It is as much art in the one case as in the other. To get rid of all visible artifice is, of course, the great thing in both cases. There is so little apparent artifice in Whitman's case that he has been accused of being entirely without art, and of throwing his matter together in a haphazard way, — "without thought, without selection," without "composition, evolution, vertebration of style," says Mr. Gosse. Yet his work more than holds its own in a field where these things alone are supposed to insure success. Whitman covers up his processes well, and knows how to hit his mark without seeming to take aim. The verdicts upon him are mainly contradictory, because each critic only takes in a part of his scheme. Mr. Stedman finds him a formalist. Mr. Gosse finds in him a negation of all form. The London critic says he is without thought. A Boston critic speaks of what he happily calls the

"waves of thought" in his work, — vast mind-impulses that lift and sway great masses of concrete facts and incidents. Whitman knew from the start that he would puzzle and baffle his critics, and would escape from them like air when they felt most sure they had him in their verbal nets. So it has been from the first, and so it continues to be. Without one thing, he says, it is useless to read him; and of what that one thing needful is, he gives only the vaguest hint, only a "significant look."

XXI

I may here notice two objections to Whitman urged by Mr. Stedman, — a critic for whose opinion I have great respect, and a man for whom I have a genuine affection. With all his boasted breadth and tolerance, Whitman, says my friend, is narrow; and with all his vaunted escape from the shackles of verse form, he is a formalist: his "irregular, manneristic chant" is as much at the extreme of artificiality as is the sonnet. These certainly are faults that one does not readily associate with the work of Whitman. But then I remember that the French critic, Scherer, charges Carlyle, the apostle of the gospel of sincerity, with being insincere and guilty of canting about cant. If Carlyle is insincere, I think it very likely that Whitman may be narrow and hide-bound. These things are so much a matter of temperament that one cannot judge for an-

other. Yet one ought not to confound narrowness and breadth, or little and big. All earnest, uncompromising men are more or less open to the charge of narrowness. A man is narrow when he concentrates himself upon a point; even a cannon-shot is. Whitman was narrow in the sense that he was at times monotonous; that he sought but few effects, that he poured himself out mainly in one channel, that he struck chiefly the major chords of life. His "Leaves" do not show a great range of artistic *motifs*. A versatile, many-sided nature he certainly was not; a large, broad, tolerant nature he as certainly was. He does not assume many and diverse forms like a purely artistic talent, sporting with and masquerading in all the elements of life, like Shakespeare; but in his own proper form, and in his own proper person, he gives a sense of vastness and power that are unapproached in modern literature. He asserts himself uncompromisingly, but he would have you do the same. "He who spreads a wider breast than my own proves the width of my own." "He most honors my style who learns under it to destroy the teacher." His highest hope is to be the soil of superior poems.

Mr. Stedman thinks he detects in the poet a partiality for the coarser, commoner elements of our humanity over the finer and choicer, — for the "rough" over the gentleman. But when all things have been duly considered, it will be found, I think,

that he finally rests only with great personal qualities and traits. He is drawn by powerful, natural persons, wherever found, — men and women self-poised, fully equipped on all sides: —

"I announce a great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste, affectionate, compassionate, fully arm'd,
I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold," —

and much more to the same effect.

"I say nourish a great intellect, a great brain:
If I have said anything to the contrary, I hereby retract it."

Whitman is a formalist, just as every man who has a way of his own of saying and doing things, no matter how natural, is a formalist; but he is not a stickler for form of any sort. He has his own proper form, of course, which he rarely departs from. At one extreme of artificiality Mr. Stedman apparently places the sonnet. This is an arbitrary form; its rules are inflexible; it is something cut and shaped and fitted together after a predetermined pattern, and to this extent is artificial. If Whitman's irregularity was equally studied; if it gave us the same sense of something cunningly planned and wrought to a particular end, clipped here, curbed there, folded back in this line, drawn out in that, and attaining to a certain mechanical proportion and balance as a whole, — then there

would be good ground for the critic's charge. But such is not the case. Whitman did not have, nor claim to have, the architectonic power of the great constructive poets. He did not build the lofty rhyme. He did not build anything, strictly speaking. He let himself go. He named his book after the grass, which makes a carpet over the earth, and which is a sign and a presence rather than a form.

XXII

Whitman's defects flow out of his great qualities. What we might expect from his size, his sense of mass and multitude, would be an occasional cumbrousness, turgidity, unwieldiness, ineffectualness: what we might expect from his vivid realism would be an occasional over-rankness or grossness; from his bluntness, a rudeness; from his passion for country, a little spread-eagleism; from his masterly use of indirection, occasional obscurity; from his mystic identification of himself with what is commonest, cheapest, nearest, a touch at times of the vulgar and unworthy; from his tremendous practical democracy, a bias at times toward too low an average; from his purpose "to effuse egotism and show it underlying all," may arise a little too much self-assertion. The price paid for his strenuousness and earnestness will be a want of humor; his determination to glorify the human body, as God made it, will bring him in collision with our notions

of the decent, the proper; the "courageous, clear voice" with which he seeks to prove the sexual organs and acts "illustrious," will result in his being excluded from good society; his "heroic nudity" will be apt to set the good dame, Belles-lettres, all a-shiver; his healthful coarseness and godlike candor will put all the respectable folk to flight.

XXIII

To say that Whitman is a poet in undress is true within certain limits. If it conveys the impression that he is careless or inapt in the use of language, or that the word is not always the fit word, the best word, the saying does him injustice. No man ever searched more diligently for the right word — for just the right word — than did Whitman. He would wait for days and weeks for the one ultimate epithet. How long he pressed the language for some word or phrase that would express the sense of the evening call of the robin, and died without the sight! But his language never obtrudes itself. It has never stood before the mirror, it does not consciously challenge your admiration, it is not obviously studied, it is never on dress parade. His matchless phrases seem like chance hits, so much so that some critics have wondered how he happened to *stumble* upon them. His verse is not dressed up, because it has so few of the artificial adjuncts of poetry, — no finery or stuck-on ornament, —

nothing obtrusively beautiful or poetic; and because it bears itself with the freedom and nonchalance of a man in his every-day attire.

But it is always in a measure misleading to compare language with dress, to say that a poet clothes his thought, etc. The language is the thought; it is an incarnation, not an outside tailoring. To improve the expression is to improve the thought. In the most vital writing, the thought is nude; the mind of the reader touches something alive and real. When we begin to hear the rustle of a pompous or highly wrought vocabulary, when the man begins to dress his commonplace ideas up in fine phrases, we have enough of him.

Indeed, it is only the mechanical writer who may be said to "clothe" his ideas with words; the real poet thinks through words.

XXIV

I see that a plausible criticism might be made against Whitman, perhaps has been made, that in him we find the big merely, — strength without power, size without quality. A hasty reader might carry away this impression from his work, because undoubtedly one of the most obvious things about him is his great size. It is impossible not to feel that here is a large body of some sort. We have come upon a great river, a great lake, an immense plain, a rugged mountain. We feel that this mind

requires a large space to turn in. The page nearly always gives a sense of mass and multitude. All attempts at the playful or humorous seem ungainly. The style is processional and agglomerative. Out of these vast, rolling, cloud-like masses does there leap forth the true lightning? It seems to me there can be no doubt about that. The spirit easily triumphs. There is not only mass, there is penetration; not only vastness, there is sublimity; not only breadth, there is quality and charm. He is both Dantesque and Darwinian, as has been said.

Mr. Symonds was impressed with this quality of vastness in Whitman, and, despairing of conveying an adequate notion of him by any process of literary analysis, resorts to the use of a succession of metaphors, — the symbolic use of objects that convey the idea of size and power. Thus, "he is Behemoth, wallowing in primeval jungles;" "he is a gigantic elk or buffalo, trampling the grass of the wilderness;" "he is an immense tree, a kind of Ygdrasil, striking its roots deep down into the bowels of the world;" "he is the circumambient air in which float shadowy shapes, rise mirage-towers and palm-groves;" "he is the globe itself, — all seas, lands, forests, climates, storms, snows, sunshines, rains of universal earth."

Colonel Ingersoll said there was something in him akin to mountains and plains, and to the globe itself.

But Whitman is something more than a literary colossus. Pigmies can only claim pigmy honors. Size, after all, rules in this universe, because size and power go together. The large bodies rule the small. There is no impression of greatness in art without something that is analogous to size, — breadth, depth, height. The sense of vastness is never the gift of a minor poet. You cannot paint Niagara on the thumb-nail. Great artists are distinguished from small by the majesty of their conceptions.

Whitman's air is continental. He implies a big country, vast masses of humanity, sweeping and stirring times, the triumphs of science and the industrial age. He is the poet of mass and multitude. In his pages things are grouped and on the run, as it were. Little detail, little or no elaboration, little or no development of a theme, no minute studied effects so dear to the poets, but glimpses, suggestions, rapid surveys, sweeping movements, processions of objects, vista, vastness, — everywhere the effect of a man overlooking great spaces and calling off the significant and interesting points. He never stops to paint; he is contented to suggest. His "Leaves" are a rapid, joyous survey of the forces and objects of the universe, first with reference to character and personality, and next with reference to America and democracy. His method of treatment is wholesale and accumulative. It is typified by this passage in his first poem: —

"Listen! I will be honest with you,
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new
prizes.

"I tramp a perpetual journey,
My signs are a rain-proof coat, good shoes, and a staff
cut from the woods,
No friend of mine takes his ease in my chair,
I have no chair, no church, no philosophy,
I lead no man to a dinner table, library, or exchange,
But each man and each woman of you I lead upon a knoll,
My left hand hooking you round the waist,
My right hand pointing to landscapes of continents and a
plain public road."

He deals with the major elements of life, and always aims at large effects. "Lover of populous pavements," he is occupied with large thoughts and images, with races, eras, multitudes, processions. His salute is to the world. He keeps the whole geography of his country and of the globe before him; his purpose in his poems spans the whole modern world. He views life as from some eminence from which many shades and differences disappear. He sees things in mass. Many of our cherished conventions disappear from his point of view. He sees the fundamental and necessary things. His vision is sweeping and final. He tries himself by the orbs. His standards of poetry and art are astronomic. He sees his own likeness in the

earth. His rapture springs, not so much from the contemplation of bits and parts as from the contemplation of the whole. There is a breadth of sympathy and of interest that does not mind particulars. He says: —

"It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe,
moving so exactly in its orbit forever and ever,
without one jolt, or the untruth of a single second,
I do not think it was made in six days, nor in ten thousand years, nor ten billions of years,
Nor planned and built one thing after another as an architect plans and builds a house."

In old age he sees "the estuary that enlarges and spreads itself grandly as it pours into the sea." He looks upon all things at a certain remove. These are typical lines: —

"A thousand perfect men and women appear,
Around each gathers a cluster of friends, and gay children and youths, with offerings.

"Women sit, or move to and fro, some old, some young,
The young are beautiful — but the old are more beautiful than the young."

"The Runner," "A Farm Picture," and scores of others, are to the same effect. Always wholes, total impressions, — always a view as of a "strong bird on pinion free." Few details, but panoramic effects; not the flower, but the landscape; not a tree, but a forest; not a street corner, but a city. The title

of one of his poems, "A Song of the Rolling Earth," might stand as the title of the book. When he gathers details and special features he masses them like a bouquet of herbs and flowers. No cameo carving, but large, bold, rough, heroic sculpturing. The poetry is always in the totals, the breadth, the sweep of conception. The part that is local, specific, genre, near at hand, is Whitman himself; his personality is the background across which it all flits.

We make a mistake when we demand of Whitman what the other poets give us, — studies, embroidery, delicate tracings, pleasing artistic effects, rounded and finished specimens. We shall understand him better if we inquire what his own standards are, what kind of a poet he would be. He tells us over and over again that he would emulate the great forces and processes of Nature. He seeks for hints in the sea, the mountain, in the orbs themselves. In the wild splendor and savageness of a Colorado canyon he sees a spirit kindred to his own.

He dwells fondly, significantly, upon the amplitude, the coarseness, and what he calls the sexuality, of the earth, and upon its great charity and equilibrium.

"The earth," he says, "does not withhold; it is generous enough: —

"The truths of the earth continually wait, they are not so
concealed either,
They are calm, subtle, untransmissible by print.

They are imbued through all things, conveying themselves willingly,
Conveying a sentiment and invitation of the earth — I utter and utter!"

. . . . . .

"The earth does not argue,
Is not pathetic, has no arrangements,
Does not scream, haste, persuade, threaten, promise,
Makes no discriminations, has no conceivable failures,
Closes nothing, refuses nothing, shuts none out.
Of all the powers, objects, states, it notifies, shuts none out."

He says the best of life

"Is not what you anticipated — it is cheaper, easier, nearer,"

and that the earth affords the final standard of all things: —

"I swear there can be no theory of any account unless it corroborate the theory of the earth,
No politics, art, religion, behavior, or what not, is of account unless it compares with the amplitude of the earth,
Unless it face the exactness, vitality, impartiality, rectitude, of the earth."

No one can make a study of our poet without being deeply impressed with these and kindred passages: —

"The maker of poems settles justice, reality, immortality,
His insight and power encircle things and the human race.

The singers do not beget, only the Poet begets,
The singers are welcom'd, understood, appear often enough, but rare has the day been, likewise the spot, of the birth of the maker of poems, the Answerer
(Not every century, nor every five centuries has contain'd such a day, for all its names).

. . . . . .

"All this time and at all times wait the words of true poems,
The words of true poems do not merely please,
The true poets are not followers of beauty, but the august masters of beauty;
The greatness of sons is the exuding of the greatness of mothers and fathers,
The words of true poems are the tuft and final applause of science.

"Divine instinct, breadth of vision, the law of reason, health, rudeness of body, withdrawnness,
Gayety, sun-tan, air-sweetness, such are some of the words of poems,
The sailor, the traveler, underlie the maker of poems, the Answerer,
The builder, geometer, chemist, anatomist, phrenologist, artist, all these underlie the maker of poems, the Answerer.
The words of the true poems give you more than poems;
They give you to form for yourself poems, religions, politics, war, peace, behavior, histories, essays, daily life, and everything else.

They balance ranks, colors, races, creeds, and the sexes;
They do not seek beauty, they are sought;
Forever touching them or close upon them follows beauty,
longing, fain, love-sick.
They prepare for death, yet are they not the finish, but
rather the outset,
They bring none to his or her terminus or to be contented
and full,
Whom they take they take into space to behold the birth
of stars, to learn one of the meanings,
To launch off with absolute faith, to sweep through the
ceaseless rings and never be quiet again.

. . . . . .

"Of these States the poet is the equable man,
Not in him but off from him things are grotesque, eccentric, fail of their full returns,
Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad,
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion,
neither more nor less,
He is the arbiter of the diverse, he is the key,
He is the equalizer of his age and land,
He supplies what wants supplying, he checks what wants
checking,
In peace out of him speaks the spirit of peace, large, rich,
thrifty, building populous towns, encouraging
agriculture, arts, commerce, lighting the study of
man, the soul, health, immortality, government,
In war he is the best backer of the war, he fetches artillery
as good as the engineer's, he can make every word
he speaks draw blood,

The years straying toward infidelity he withholds by his steady faith,
He is no arguer, he is judgment (nature accepts him absolutely),
He judges not as the judge judges, but as the sun falling round a helpless thing,
As he sees the farthest he has the most faith,
His thoughts are the hymns of the praise of things,
In the dispute on God and eternity he is silent,
He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement,
He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and women as dreams or dots.

. . . . . .

"Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from other poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,
Admirers, impostors, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature."

Folded up in these sentences, often many times folded up, is Whitman's idea of the poet, the begetter, the reconciler; not the priest of the beautiful, but the master of the All, who does not appear once in centuries.

We hear nothing of the popular conception of the poet, well reflected in these lines of Tennyson: —

"The poet in a golden clime was born, with golden stars above."

"Golden stars" and "golden climes" do not figure at all in Whitman's pages; the spirit of romance is sternly excluded.

Whitman's ideal poet is the most composite man, rich in temperament, rank in the human attributes, embracing races and eras in himself. All men see themselves in him: —

"The mechanic takes him for a mechanic,
And the soldier supposes him to be a soldier, and the sailor
that he has followed the sea,
And the authors take him for an author, and the artists
for an artist,
And the laborers perceive he could labor with them and
love them,
No matter what the work is, that he is the one to follow it,
or has followed it,
No matter what the nation, that he might find his brothers
and sisters there.

. . . . . .

"The gentleman of perfect blood acknowledges his perfect
blood,
The insulter, the prostitute, the angry person, the beggar,
see themselves in the ways of him, he strangely
transmutes them,
They are not vile any more, they hardly know themselves
they are so grown."

Let us hold the poet to his own ideals, and not condemn him because he has not aimed at something foreign to himself.

The questions which Whitman puts to him who would be an American poet may fairly be put to himself.

"Are you faithful to things? Do you teach what the land and sea, the bodies of men, womanhood, amativeness, heroic angers, teach?

Have you sped through fleeting customs, popularities?

Can you hold your hand against all seductions, follies, whirls, fierce contentions? are you very strong? are you really of the whole people?

Are you not of some coterie? some school, or mere religion?

Are you done with reviews and criticisms of life? animating now to life itself?

Have you vivified yourself from the maternity of these States?

Have you, too, the old, ever-fresh forbearance and impartiality?

. . . . . .

What is this you bring my America?

Is it uniform with my country?

Is it not something that has been better done or told before?

Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship?

Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a pettiness? — is the good old cause in it?

Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, politicians, literats of enemies' lands?

Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?

Does it answer universal needs? will it improve manners?
Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?
Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear again in my strength, gait, face?
Have real employments contributed to it? Original makers, not mere amanuenses?"

So far as Whitman's poetry falls within any of the old divisions it is lyrical, — a personal and individual utterance. Open the book anywhere and you are face to face with a man. His eye is fixed upon you. It is a man's voice you hear, and it is directed to *you*. He is not elaborating a theme: he is suggesting a relation or hinting a meaning. He is not chiseling, or carving a work of art: he is roughly outlining a man; he is planting a seed, or tilling a field.

XXV

I believe it was the lamented Professor Clifford who first used the term "cosmic emotion" in connection with "Leaves of Grass." Whitman's atmosphere is so distinctly outside of and above that which ministers to our social and domestic wants, — the confined and perfumed air of an indoor life; his mood and temper are so habitually begotten by the contemplation of the orbs and the laws and processes of universal nature, that the phrase often comes to mind in considering him. He is not in any

sense, except perhaps in a few minor pieces, a domestic and fireside poet, — a solace to our social instincts and cultivated ideals. He is too large, too aboriginal, too elemental, too strong for that. I seem to understand and appreciate him best when I keep in mind the earth as a whole, and its relation to the system. Any large view or thought, or survey of life or mankind, is a preparation for him. He demands the outdoor temper and habit, he demands a sense of space and power, he demands above all things a feeling for reality. "Vastness" is a word that applies to him; abysmal man, cosmic consciousness, the standards of the natural universal, — all hint some phase of his genius. His survey of life and duty is from a point not included in any four walls, or in any school or convention. It is a survey from out the depths of being; the breath of worlds and systems is in these utterances. His treatment of sex, of comradeship, of death, of democracy, of religion, of art, of immortality, is in the spirit of the great out-of-doors of the universe; the point of view is cosmic rather than personal or philanthropic. What charity is this! — the charity of sunlight that spares nothing and turns away from nothing. What "heroic nudity"! like the nakedness of rocks and winter trees. What sexuality! like the lust of spring or the push of tides. What welcome to death, as only the night which proves the day!

XXVI

This orbic nature which so thrills and fills Whitman is not at all akin to that which we get in the so-called nature poets of Wordsworth and his school, — the charm of privacy, of the sequestered, the cosy, — qualities that belong to the art of a domestic, home-loving race, and to lovers of solitude. Tennyson's poetry abounds in these qualities; so does Wordsworth's. There is less of them in Browning, and more of them in the younger poets. That communing with nature, those dear friendships with birds and flowers, that gentle wooing of the wild and sylvan, that flavor of the rural, the bucolic, — all these are important features in the current popular poetry, but they are not to any marked extent characteristic of Whitman. The sentiment of domesticity, love as a sentiment; the attraction of children, home, and fireside; the attraction of books, art, travel; our pleasure in the choice, the refined, the artificial, — these are not the things you are to demand of Whitman. You do not demand them of Homer or Dante or the Biblical writers. We are to demand of him the major things, primary things; the lift of great emotions; the cosmic, the universal; the joy of health, of selfhood; the stimulus of the real, the modern, the American; always the large, the virile; always perfect acceptance and triumph.

Whitman's free use of the speech of the common

people is doubtless offensive to a fastidious literary taste. Such phrases as "I will be even with you," "what would it amount to," "give in," "not one jot less;" "young fellows," "old fellows," "stuck up," "every bit as much," "week in and week out," and a thousand others, would jar on the page of any other poet more than on his.

XXVII

William Rossetti says his language has a certain ultimate quality. Another critic speaks of his absolute use of language. Colonel Ingersoll credits him with more supreme words than have been uttered by any other man of our time.

The power to use words was in Whitman's eyes a divine power, and was bought with a price: —

"For only at last after many years, after chastity, friendship, procreation, prudence, and nakedness,
After treading ground, and breasting river and lake,
After a loosen'd throat, after absorbing eras, temperaments, races, after knowledge, freedom, crimes,
After complete faith, after clarifying elevations and removing obstructions,
After these and more, it is just possible there comes to a man, a woman, the divine power to speak words."

Whitman's sense of composition and his rare artistic faculty of using language are seen, as John Addington Symonds says, in the "countless clear

and perfect phrases" "which are hung, like golden medals of consummate workmanship and incised form, in rich clusters over every poem he produced. And, what he aimed at above all, these phrases are redolent of the very spirit of the emotions they suggest, communicate the breadth and largeness of the natural things they indicate, embody the essence of realities in living words which palpitate and burn forever."

The great poet is always more or less the original, the abysmal man. He is face to face with universal laws and conditions. He speaks out of a greater exaltation of sentiment than the prose-writer. He takes liberties; he speaks for all men; he is a bird on "pinions free."

XXVIII

In saying or implying that Whitman's aim was not primarily literary or artistic, I am liable to be misunderstood; and when Whitman himself says, "No one will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward art or æstheticism," he exposes himself to the same misconception. It is the literary and poetic value of his verses alone that can save them. Their philosophy, their democracy, their vehement patriotism, their religious ardor, their spirit of comradeship, or what not, will not alone suffice. All depends upon

the manner in which these things are presented to us. Do we get the reality, or words about the reality? No matter what the content of the verse, unless into the whole is breathed the breath of the true creative artist they will surely perish. Oblivion awaits every utterance not touched with the life of the spirit. Whitman was as essentially an artist as was Shakespeare or Dante; his work shows the same fusion of imagination, will, emotion, personality; it carries the same quality of real things, — not the same shaping, constructive power, but the same quickening, stimulating power, the same magic use of words. The artist in him is less conscious of itself, is less differentiated from the man, than in the other poets. He objected to having his work estimated for its literary value alone, but in so doing he used the word in a narrow sense.

After all these ages of the assiduous cultivation of literature, there has grown up in men a kind of lust of the mere art of writing, just as, after so many generations of religious training, there has grown up a passion for religious forms and observances. "Mere literature" has come to be a current phrase in criticism, meaning, I suppose, that the production to which it is applied is notable only for good craftsmanship. In the same spirit one speaks of mere scholarship, or of a certain type of man as a mere gentleman. It was mere literature that Whitman was afraid of, the æsthetic disease, the passion

for letters, for poetry, divorced from love of life and of things. None knew better than he that the ultimate value of any imaginative and emotional work, even of the Bible, is its literary value. Its spiritual and religious value is inseparably connected with its literary value.

"Leaves of Grass" is not bookish; it is always the voice of a man, and not of a scholar or conventional poet, that addresses us. We all imbue words more or less with meanings of our own; but, from the point of view I am now essaying, literature is the largest fact, and embraces all inspired utterances. The hymn-book seeks to embody or awaken religious emotion alone; would its religious value be less if its poetic value were more? I think not. The best of the Psalms of David, from the religious point of view, are the best from the literary point of view. What reaches and thrills the soul, — that is great art. What arouses the passions — mirth, anger, indignation, pity — may or may not be true art. No one, for instance, can read "Uncle Tom's Cabin" without tears, laughter, anger; but no one, I fancy, could ever get from it that deep, tranquil pleasure and edification that the great imaginative works impart. Keble's poetry is more obviously religious than Wordsworth's or Arnold's, but how short-lived, because it is not embalmed in the true artistic spirit! In all the great poems, there is something as deep and calm as the light and the sky, and

as common and universal. I find this something in Whitman. In saying, therefore, that his aim was ulterior to that of art, that he was not begotten by the literary spirit, I only mean that his aim was that of the largest art, and of the most vital and comprehensive literature. We should have heard the last of his "Leaves" long ago had they not possessed unmistakably the vitality of true literature, "incomparable things, incomparably well said," as Emerson remarked.

A scientific or philosophical work lives independently of its literary merit, but an emotional and imaginative work lives only by virtue of its literary merit. Different meanings may be attached to these words "literary merit" by different persons. I use them as meaning that vital and imaginative use of language which is the characteristic of all true literature. The most effective way of saying a thing in the region of the sentiments and emotions, — that is the true literary way.

HIS RELATION TO LIFE AND MORALS

I

I HAVE divided my subject into many chapters, and given to each a separate heading, yet I am aware that they are all but slight variations of a single theme, — viz., Whitman's reliance upon absolute nature. That there might be no mistake about it, and that his reader might at once be put in possession of his point of view, the poet declared at the outset of his career that at every hazard he should let nature speak.

"Creeds and schools in abeyance
Retiring back awhile, sufficed at what they are, but never
forgotten,
I harbor for good or bad,
I permit to speak at every hazard,
Nature without check, with original energy."

The hazard of letting nature speak will, of course, be great, — the hazard of gross misapprehension on the part of the public, and of hesitancy and inadequacy on the part of the poet. The latter danger, I think, was safely passed; Whitman never flinched or wavered for a moment, and that his criticism is

adequate seems to me equally obvious. But the former contingency — the gross misapprehension of the public, even the wiser public — has been astounding. He has been read in a narrow, literal, bourgeois spirit. The personal pronoun, which he uses so freely, has been taken to stand for the private individual Walt Whitman, so that he has been looked upon as a compound of egotism and licentiousness. His character has been traduced, and his purpose in the "Leaves" entirely misunderstood.

We see at a glance that his attitude towards nature, towards God, towards the body and the soul, reverses many of the old ascetic theological conceptions.

All is good, all is as it should be; to abase the body is to abase the soul. Man is divine inside and out, and is no more divine about the head than about the loins. It is from this point of view that he has launched his work. He believed the time had come for an utterance out of radical, uncompromising human nature; let conventions and refinements stand back, let nature, let the soul, let the elemental forces speak; let the body, the passions, sex, be exalted; the stone rejected by the builders shall be the chief stone in the corner. Evil shall be shown to be a part of the good, and death shall be welcomed as joyously as life.

Whitman says his poems will do just as much evil as good, and perhaps more. To many readers

this confession of itself would be his condemnation To others it would be an evidence of his candor and breadth of view. I suppose all great vital forces, whether embodied in a man or in a book, work evil as well as good. If they do not, they only tickle the surface of things. Has not the Bible worked evil also? Some think more evil than good. The dews and the rains and the sunshine work evil.

From Whitman's point of view, there is no good without evil; evil is an unripe kind of good. There is no light without darkness, no life without death, no growth without pain and struggle. Beware the emasculated good, the good by exclusion rather than by victory. "Leaves of Grass" will work evil on evil minds, — on narrow, unbalanced minds. It is not a guide, but an inspiration; not a remedy, but health and strength. Art does not preach directly but indirectly; it is moral by its spirit, and the mood and temper it begets.

Whitman, in celebrating manly pride, self-reliance, the deliciousness of sex; in glorifying the body, the natural passions and appetites, nativity; in identifying himself with criminals and low or lewd persons; in frankly imputing to himself all sins men are guilty of, runs the risk, of course, of being read in a spirit less generous and redemptive than his own.

The charity of the poet may stimulate the license of the libertine; the optimism of the seer may con-

firm the evil-doer; the equality of the democrat may foster the insolence of the rowdy. This is our lookout and not the poet's. We take the same chances with him that we do with nature; we are to trim our sails to the breeze he brings; we are to sow wheat and not tares for his rains to water.

Whitman's glorification of the body has led some critics to say that he is the poet of the body only. But it is just as true to say he is the poet of the soul only. He always seeks the spiritual through the material. He treats the body and the soul as one, and he treats all things as having reference to the soul.

"I will not make a poem, nor the least part of a poem, but has reference to the soul,
Because, having look'd at the objects of the universe, I find there is no one, nor any particle of one, but has reference to the soul."

The curious physiological strain which runs through the poems is to be considered in the light of this idea. He exalts the body because in doing so he exalts the soul.

"Sure as the earth swims through the heavens, does every one of its objects pass into spiritual results."

II

The reader of Whitman must do his or her own moralizing; the poet is here not to deprecate or criticise, but to love and celebrate; he has no par-

tialities; our notions of morality do not concern him; he exploits the average man just as he finds him; he *is* the average man for the time being and confesses to all his sins and shortcomings, and we will make of the result good or evil, according to our mental horizon. That his work is unmixed good is the last thing the poet would claim for it. He has not, after the easy fashion of the moralist, set the good here and the bad there; he has blended them as they are in nature and in life; our profit and discipline begin when we have found out whither he finally tends, or when we have mastered him and extracted the good he holds. If we expect he is going to preach an austere system of morality to us, or any system of morality, we are doomed to disappointment. Does Nature preach such a system? does Nature preach at all? neither will he. He presents you the elements of good and evil in himself in vital fusion and play; your part is to see how the totals are at last good.

It is objected that Whitman is too persistent in declaring himself an animal, when the thing a man is least likely to forget is that he is an animal and the thing he is least likely to remember is that he is a spirit and a child of God. But Whitman insists with the same determination that he is a spirit and an heir of immortality, — not as one who has cheated the devil of his due, but as one who shares the privileges and felicities of all, and who finds the

divine in the human. Indeed it is here that he sounds his most joyous and triumphant note. No such faith in spiritual results, no such conviction of the truth of immortality, no such determined recognition of the unseen world as the final reality is to be found in modern poetry.

As I have said, Whitman aimed to put his whole nature in a poem — the physical or physiological, the spiritual, the æsthetic and intellectual, — without giving any undue prominence to either. If he has not done so, if he has made the animal and sexual too pronounced, more so than nature will justify in the best proportioned man, then and then only is his artistic scheme vitiated and his work truly immoral.

It may be true that the thing a man is least likely to forget is that he is an animal; what he is most likely to forget, is that the animal is just as sacred and important as any other part; indeed that it is the basis of all, and that a sane and healthful and powerful spirituality and intellectuality can only flow out of a sane and healthful animality.

"I believe in you, my soul, the other I am must not abase
itself to you,
And you must not be abased to the other."

III

Furthermore, Whitman's main problem is to project into literature the new democratic man as he

conceives him, — the man of the future, intensely American, but in the broadest sense human and cosmopolitan; he is to project him on a scale large enough for all uses and conditions, ignoring the feudal and aristocratic types which have for the most part dominated literature, and matching them with a type more copious in friendship, charity, sympathy, religion, candor, and of equal egoism and power.

It is to exploit and enforce and illustrate this type of character that "Leaves of Grass" is written. The poems are the drama of this new democratic man. This type Whitman finds in himself. He does not have to create it as Shakespeare did Hamlet or Lear; he has only to discover it in himself. He is it and he gives it free utterance. His work is, therefore, as he says, the poem of himself, — himself written large, — written as upon the face of the continent, written in the types and events he finds on all sides. He sees himself in all men, the bad as well as the good, and he sees all men in himself. All the stupendous claims he makes for himself he makes for others. His egotism is vicarious and embraces the world. It is not the private individual Walt Whitman that makes these stupendous claims for himself; it is Walt Whitman as the spokesman of the genius of American democracy. He is not to discuss a question. He is to outline a character, he is to incarnate a principle. The essay-

ist or philosopher may discuss the value of any given idea, — may talk about it; the creative artist alone can give us the thing itself, the concrete flesh-and-blood reality. Whitman is not only to make this survey, to launch this criticism; he is to embody it in a living human personality, and enable us to see the world of man and morals through its eyes. What with the scientist, the philosopher, is thought, must be emotion and passion with him.

Whitman promises that we shall share with him "two greatnesses, and a third one rising inclusive and more resplendent," —

> "The greatness of Love and Democracy and the greatness of Religion," —

not merely as ideas, but as living impulses. He is to show the spirit of absolute, impartial nature, incarnated in a human being, imbued with love, democracy, and religion, moving amid the scenes and events of the New World, sounding all the joys and abandonments of life, and re-reading the oracles from the American point of view. And the utterance launched forth is to be imbued with poetic passion.

Whitman always aims at a complete human synthesis, and leaves his reader to make of it what he can. It is not for the poet to qualify and explain. He seeks to reproduce his whole nature in a book, — reproduce it with all its contradictions and car-

nalities, the good and the bad, the coarse and the fine, the body and the soul, — to give free swing to himself, trusting to natural checks and compensations to insure a good result at last, but not at all disturbed if you find parts of it bad as in creation itself.

His method being that of the poet, and not that of the moralist or preacher, how shall he sort and sift, culling this virtue and that, giving parts and fragments instead of the entire man? He must give all, not abstractly, but concretely, synthetically.

To a common prostitute Whitman says: —

"Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you;
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you, and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you."

We are housed in social usages and laws, we are sheltered and warmed and comforted by conventions and institutions and numberless traditions; their value no one disputes. But for purposes of his own Whitman ignores them all; he lets in upon us the free and maybe raw air of the great out-of-doors of absolute nature; his standards are not found inside of any four walls; he contemplates life, and would quicken it in its fundamentals; his survey is from a plane whence our arts and refinements and petty distinctions disappear. He sees the evil of the world no less necessary than the good;

he sees death as a part of life itself; he sees the body and the soul as one; he sees the spiritual always issuing from the material; he sees not one result at last lamentable in the universe.

IV

Unless, as I have already said, we allow Whitman to be a law unto himself, we can make little of him; unless we place ourselves at his absolute point of view, his work is an offense and without meaning. The only question is, Has he a law, has he a steady and rational point of view, is his work a consistent and well-organized whole? Ask yourself, What is the point of view of absolute, uncompromising science? It is that creation is all good and sound; things are as they should be or must be; there are no conceivable failures; there is no evil in the final analysis, or, if there is, it is necessary, and plays its part also; there is no more beginning nor ending than there is now, no more heaven or hell than we find or make here: —

"Did you guess the celestial laws are yet to be work'd over and rectified?"

It has been urged that Whitman violates his own canon of the excellence of nature. But what he violates is more a secondary or acquired nature. He violates our social conventions and instincts, he exposes what we cover up; but the spirit of his

undertaking demanded this of him. Remember that at all hazards he is to let nature — absolute nature — speak; that he is to be the poet of the body as well as of the soul, and that no part of the body of a man or woman, "hearty and clean," is vile, and that "none shall be less familiar than the rest."

His glory is, that he never flinched or hesitated in following his principle to its logical conclusions, — "my commission obeying, to question it never daring."

It was an heroic sacrifice, and atones for the sins of us all, — the sins of perverting, denying, abusing the most sacred and important organs and functions of our bodies.

V

In Whitman we find the most complete identification of the man with the subject. He always is, or becomes, the thing he portrays. Not merely does he portray America, — he speaks out of the American spirit, the spirit that has broken irrevocably with the past and turns joyously to the future; he does not praise equality, he illustrates it; he puts himself down beside the lowest and most despised person, and calls him brother.

"You felons on trial in courts,
You convicts in prison-cells, you sentenced assassins chain'd and handcuff'd with iron,
Who am I too that I am not on trial or in prison?

Me ruthless and devilish as any, that my wrists are not chain'd with iron or my ankles with iron?"

He does not give a little charity, he gives himself as freely as the clouds give rain, or the sun gives light; he does not write a treatise on democracy, he applies the democratic spirit to everything in heaven and on earth, and redistributes the prizes from its points of view; he does not, except very briefly, sing the praises of science, but he launches his poems always from the scientific view of the world, in contradistinction to the old theological and mythical point of view. It is always the example, it is always the thing itself, he gives us. Few precepts, no sermon, no reproof. Does he praise candor? No, he is candor; he confesses to everything; he shows us the inmost working of his mind. We know him better than we know our nearest friends. Does he exalt the pride of man in himself, or egoism? Again he illustrates it: he is egoism; he makes the whole universe revolve around himself; he never for a moment goes out of himself; he does not seek a theme; he is the theme. His egocentric method of treatment is what characterizes him as an artist. He elaborates no theme, he builds nothing, he carves nothing, but makes himself a source and centre of pulsing, vital energy. Wave after wave radiates from him. What we see and get always is Walt Whitman. Our attention is never fixed upon the writer, but always upon the man.

Of course this method of Whitman of becoming one with his subject, and speaking out of it, is always the method of the creative artist. It is this that distinguishes the artist from the mere thinker or prose-writer. The latter tells us about a thing; the former gives us the thing, or the spirit of the thing itself.

If Whitman had put his criticism of our time and civilization in an argument or essay, the world would have received it very differently. As an intellectual statement or proposition, we could have played with it and tossed it about as a ball in a game of shuttlecock, and dropped it when we tired of it, as we do other criticism. But he gave it to us as a man, as a personality, and we find it too strong for us. It is easier to deal with a theory than with the concrete reality. A man is a summons and a challenge, and will not be easily put aside.

The great philosophical poets, like Lucretius, try to solve the riddles. Whitman's aim is only to thrust the riddles before you, to give you a new sense of them, and start the game afresh. He knows what a complex, contradictory thing the universe is, and that the most any poet can do is to break the old firmament up into new forms. To put his arms around it? No. Put your arms around your fellow-man, and then you have encompassed it as nearly as mortal can do.

VI

Whitman's attraction toward the common people was real. There is one thing that makes every-day humanity, the great, toiling, unlettered masses, forever welcome to men who unite great imagination with broad sympathies, — they give a sense of reality; they refresh, as nature always refreshes. There is a tang and a sting to the native, the spontaneous, that the cultivated rarely has. The farmer, the mechanic, the sailor, the soldier, savor of the primal and the hardy. In painting his own portrait, Whitman makes prominent the coarser, unrefined traits, because here the colors are fast, — here is the basis of all. The careful student of Whitman will surely come to see how all the elements of his picture — his pride, his candor, his democracy, his sensuality, his coarseness — finally fit together, and correct and offset one another and make a perfect unity.

No poet is so easily caricatured and turned into ridicule as Whitman. He is deficient in humor, and hence, like the Biblical writers, is sometimes on the verge of the grotesque without knowing it. The sense of the ridiculous has been enormously stimulated and developed in the modern mind, and — what is to be regretted — it has been mostly at the expense of the sense of awe and reverence. We "poke fun" at everything in this country; to whatever approaches the verge of the ridiculous we give

a push and topple it over. The fear which all Americans have before their eyes, and which is much stronger than the fear of purgatory, is the fear of appearing ridiculous. We curb and check any eccentricity or marked individuality of manners or dress, lest we expose ourselves to the shafts of ridicule. Emerson said he had heard with admiring submission the remark of a lady who declared that the sense of being perfectly well dressed gave a feeling of inward tranquillity which religion was powerless to bestow; and what ranks before religion with us as a people is being in the mode, and writing our verse and cutting our coats in the approved style. Pride of the eye, a keen sense of the proprieties and the conventionalities, and a morbid feeling for the ridiculous, would have been death to Whitman's undertaking. He would have faltered, or betrayed self-consciousness. He certainly never could have spoken with that elemental aplomb and indifference which is so marked a feature of his work. Any hesitation, any knuckling, would have been his ruin. We should have seen he was not entirely serious, and should have laughed at him. We laugh now only for a moment; the spell of his earnestness and power is soon upon us.

VII

Thoreau considered Whitman's "Leaves" worth all the sermons in the country for preaching; and

yet few poets have assumed so little the function of the preacher. His great cure-all is love; he gives himself instead of a sermon. His faith in the remedial power of affection, comradeship, is truly Christ-like. Lover of sinners is also his designation. The reproof is always indirect or implied. He brings to bear character rather than precept. He helps you as health, as nature, as fresh air, pure water help. He says to you: —

"The mockeries are not you;
Underneath them, and within them, I see you lurk;
I pursue you where none else has pursued you:
Silence, the desk, the flippant expression, the night, the accustomed routine, — if these conceal you from others, or from yourself, they do not conceal you from me.
The shaved face, the unsteady eye, the impure complexion, — if these balk others, they do not balk me.
The pert apparel, the deformed attitude, drunkenness, greed, premature death, — all these I part aside.
I track through your windings and turnings, — I come upon you where you thought eye should never come upon you."

Whitman said, in the now famous preface of 1855, that "the greatest poet does not moralize, or make applications of morals, — he knows the soul." There is no preaching or reproof in the "Leaves."

"I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame;
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men, at anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done;
I see, in low life, the mother misused by her children, dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate;
I see the wife misused by her husband; I see the treacherous seducer of the young woman;
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love, attempted to be hid, — I see these sights on the earth,
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny; I see martyrs and prisoners,
I observe a famine at sea, — I observe the sailors casting lots who shall be killed, to preserve the lives of the rest,
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon laborers, the poor, and upon negroes, and the like;
All these — all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon,
See, hear, and am silent."

Only once does he shame and rebuke the offender; then he holds up to him "a hand-mirror."

"Hold it up sternly! See this it sends back! (who is it? is it you?)
Outside fair costume, — within, ashes and filth.
No more a flashing eye, — no more a sonorous voice or springy step,
Now some slave's eye, voice, hands, step,

A drunkard's breath, unwholesome eater's face, venerealee's flesh,
Lungs rotting away piecemeal, stomach sour and cankerous,
Joints rheumatic, bowels clogged with abomination,
Blood circulating dark and poisonous streams,
Words babble, hearing and touch callous,
No brain, no heart left, no magnetism of sex;
Such, from one look in this looking-glass ere you go hence,
Such a result so soon — and from such a beginning!"

The poet's way is so different from the moralist's way! The poet confesses all, loves all, — has no preferences. He is moral only in his results. We ask ourselves, Does he breathe the air of health? Can he stand the test of nature? Is he tonic and inspiring? That he shocks us is nothing. The first touch of the sea is a shock. Does he toughen us, does he help make arterial blood?

All that men do and are guilty of attracts him. Their vices and excesses, — he would make these his own also. He is jealous lest he be thought better than other men, — lest he seem to stand apart from even criminals and offenders. When the passion for human brotherhood is upon him, he is balked by nothing; he goes down into the social mire to find his lovers and equals. In the pride of our morality and civic well-being, this phase of his work shocks us; but there are moods when the soul says it is good, and we rejoice in the strong man that can do it.

The restrictions, denials, and safeguards put upon us by the social order, and the dictates of worldly prudence, fall only before a still more fervid humanism, or a still more vehement love.

The vital question is, Where does he leave us? On firmer ground, or in the mire? Depleted and enervated, or full and joyous? In the gloom of pessimism, or in the sunlight of its opposite? —

"*So long!*
I announce a man or woman coming — perhaps you are the one;
I announce a great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste, affectionate, compassionate, fully armed.

"*So long!*
I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold,
And I announce an old age that shall lightly and joyfully meet its translation.

"I announce myriads of youths, beautiful, gigantic, sweet-blooded;
I announce a race of splendid and savage old men."

There is no contradiction here. The poet sounds all the experiences of life, and he gives out the true note at last.

"No specification is necessary, — all that a male or female does, that is vigorous, benevolent, clean, is so

> much profit to him or her, in the unshakable order of the universe, and through the whole scope of it forever."

VIII

Nothing but the most uncompromising religious purpose can justify certain things in the "Leaves;" nothing but the most buoyant and pervasive spirituality can justify its overwhelming materiality; nothing but the most creative imagination can offset its tremendous realism; nothing but the note of universal brotherhood can atone for its vehement Americanism; nothing but the primal spirit of poesy itself can make amends for this open flouting of the routine poetic, and this endless procession before us of the common and the familiar.

IX

Whitman loved the word "unrefined." It was one of the words he would have us apply to himself. He was unrefined, as the air, the soil, the water, and all sweet natural things are unrefined (fine but not *re*fined). He applies the word to himself two or three times in the course of his poems. He loved the words sun-tan, air-sweetness, brawn, etc. He speaks of his "savage song," not to call forth the bards of the past, he says, but to invoke the bards of the future.

"Have I sung so capricious and loud my savage songs?"

The thought that his poems might help contribute to the production of a "race of splendid and savage old men" was dear to him. He feared the depleting and emasculating effects of our culture and conventions. The decay of maternity and paternity in this country, the falling off of the native populations, were facts full of evil omen. His ideal of manly or womanly character is rich in all the purely human qualities and attributes; rich in sex, in sympathy, in temperament; physiologically sound and clean, as well as mentally and morally so.

"Fear grace, fear delicatesse;
Fear the mellow-sweet, the sucking of honey-juice:
Beware the advancing mortal ripening of nature!
Beware what precedes the decay of the ruggedness of states and men."

He was himself the savage old man he invoked. It was no part of his plan to preach, in refined and euphonious terms, hygiene and the value of the natural man, but to project into literature the thing itself, to exploit a character coarse as well as fine, and to imbue his poems with a physiological quality as well as a psychological and intellectual.

"I will scatter the new roughness and gladness among them."

He says to the pale, impotent victim of over-refinement, with intentional rudeness,

"Open your scarf'd chops till I blow grit within you."

X

One of the key-words to Whitman both as a man and a poet is the word "composite." He was probably the most composite man this century has produced, and in this respect at least is representative of the American of the future, who must be the result of the blending of more diverse racial elements than any man of history. He seems to have had an intuition of his composite character when he said in his first poem: —

"I am large, — I contain multitudes."

The London correspondent of the "New York Tribune," in reluctantly conceding at the time of the poet's death something to the British admiration of him, said he was "rich in temperament." The phrase is well chosen. An English expert on the subject of temperament, who visited Whitman some years ago, said he had all four temperaments, the sanguine, the nervous, the melancholic, and the lymphatic, while most persons have but two temperaments, and rarely three.

It was probably the composite character of Whitman that caused him to attract such diverse and opposite types of men, — scholars and workingmen, lawyers, doctors, scientists, and men of the world, — and that made him personally such a puzzle to

most people, — so impossible to classify. On the street the promenaders would turn and look after him, and I have often heard them ask each other, "What man was that?" He has often been taken for a doctor, and during his services in the army hospitals various myths were floating about concerning him. Now he was a benevolent Catholic priest, — then some unknown army general, or retired sea captain; at one time he was reputed to be one of the owners of the Cunard line of steamers. To be taken for a Californian was common. One recalls the composite character of the poet whom he outlines in his poems (see quotation, page 181).

The book is as composite as the man. It is all things to all men; it lends itself to a multitude of interpretations. Every earnest reader of it will find some clew or suggestion by the aid of which he fancies he can unlock the whole book, but in the end he will be pretty sure to discover that one key is not enough. To one critic, his book is the "hoarse song of a man," its manly and masculine element attracts him; to another he is the poet of joy, to another the poet of health, to still another he is the bard of personality; others read him as the poet of nature, or the poet of democracy. His French critic, Gabriel Sarrazin, calls him an apostle, — the apostle of the idea that man is an indivisible fragment of the universal Divinity.

XI

What has a poet of Whitman's aim to do with decency or indecency, with modesty or immodesty? These are social or conventional virtues; he represents mainly primary qualities and forces. Does life, does death, does nature, respect our proprieties, our conventional veils and illusions? Neither will he. He will strip them all away. He will act and speak as if all things in the universe were equally sacred and divine; as if all men were really his brothers, all women his sisters; as if all parts of the human body were equally beautiful and wonderful; as if fatherhood and motherhood, birth and begetting, were sacred acts. Of course it is easy to see that this course will speedily bring him in collision with the guardians of taste and social morality. But what of that? He professes to take his cue from the elemental laws. "I reckon I behave no more proudly than the level I plant my house by." The question is, Is he adequate, is he man enough, to do it? Will he not falter, or betray self-consciousness? Will he be true to his ideal through thick and thin? The social gods will all be outraged, but that is less to him than the candor and directness of nature in whose spirit he assumes to speak.

Nothing is easier than to convict Walt Whitman

of what is called indecency; he laughs indifferent when you have done so. It is not your gods that he serves. He says he would be as indifferent of observation as the trees or rocks. And it is here that we must look for his justification, upon ethical rather than upon the grounds of conventional art. He has taken our sins upon himself. He has applied to the morbid sex-consciousness, that has eaten so deeply into our social system, the heroic treatment; he has fairly turned it naked into the street. He has not merely in words denied the inherent vileness of sex; he has denied it in very deed. We should not have taken offense had he confined himself to words, — had he said sex is pure, the body is as clean about the loins as about the head; but being an artist, a creator, and not a mere thinker or preacher, he was compelled to act, — to do the thing instead of saying it.

The same in other matters. Being an artist, he could not merely say all men were his brothers; he must show them as such. If their weakness and sins are his also, he must not flinch when it comes to the test; he must make his words good. We may be shocked at the fullness and minuteness of the specification, but that is no concern of his; he deals with the concrete and not with the abstract, — fraternity and equality as a reality, not as a sentiment.

XII

In the phase in which we are now considering him, Whitman appears as the Adamic man re-born here in the nineteenth century, or with science and the modern added, and fully and fearlessly embodying himself in a poem. It is stronger than we can stand, but it is good for us, and one of these days, or one of these centuries, we shall be able to stand it and enjoy it.

"To the garden the world anew ascending,
Potent mates, daughters, sons, preluding,
The love, the life of their bodies, meaning and being,
Curious, here behold my resurrection, after slumber,
The revolving cycles, in their wide sweep, having brought me again,
Amorous, mature — all beautiful to me — all wondrous,
My limbs, and the quivering fire that ever plays through them, for reasons most wondrous;
Existing, I peer and penetrate still,
Content with the present — content with the past,
By my side, or back of me, Eve following,
Or in front, and I following her just the same."

The critics perpetually misread Whitman because they fail to see this essentially composite and dramatic character of his work, — that it is not the song of Walt Whitman the private individual, but of Walt Whitman as representative of, and speaking

for, all types and conditions of men; in fact, that it is the drama of a new democratic personality, a character outlined on a larger, more copious, more vehement scale than has yet appeared in the world. The germs of this character he would sow broadcast over the land.

In this drama of personality the poet always identifies himself with the scene, incident, experience, or person he delineates, or for whom he speaks. He says to the New Englander, or to the man of the South and the West, "I depict you as myself." In the same way he depicts offenders, roughs, criminals, and low and despised persons as himself; he lays claim to every sin of omission and commission men are guilty of, because, he says, "the germs are in all men." Men dare not tell their faults. He will make them all his own, and then tell them; there shall be full confession for once.

"If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so
for your sake;
If you remember your foolish and outlaw'd deeds, do you
think I cannot remember my own foolish and outlaw'd deeds?"

It will not do to read this poet, or any great poet, in a narrow and exacting spirit. As Whitman himself says: "The messages of great poems to each man and woman are: Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us."

In the much misunderstood group of poems called "Children of Adam" the poet speaks for the male generative principle, and all the excesses and abuses that grow out of it he unblushingly imputes to himself. What men have done and still do, while under the intoxication of the sexual passion, he does, he makes it all his own experience.

That we have here a revelation of his own personal taste and experiences may or may not be the case, but we have no more right to assume it than we have to assume that all other poets speak from experience when they use the first person singular. When John Brown mounted the scaffold in Virginia, in 1860, the poet says: —

"I was at hand, silent I stood with teeth shut close, I watch'd,
I stood very near you, old man, when cool and indifferent, but trembling with age and your unheal'd wounds, you mounted the scaffold," —

very near him he stood in spirit; very near him he stood in the person of others, but not in his own proper person.

If we take this poet literally, we shall believe he has been in California and Oregon; that he has set foot in every city on the continent; that he grew up in Virginia; that every Southern State has been by turns his home; that he has been a soldier, a sailor, a miner; that he has lived in Dakota's woods,

his "diet meat, his drink from the spring;" that he has lived on the plains with hunters and ranchmen, etc. He lays claim to all these characters, all these experiences, because what others do, what others assume, or suffer, or enjoy, that he appropriates to himself.

"I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinned with the ooze of my skin,
I fall on the weeds and stones,
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,
Taunt my dizzy ears, and beat me violently over the head with whipstocks.

"Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels — I myself become the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

"I become any presence or truth of humanity here,
See myself in prison shaped like another man,
And feel the dull unintermitted pain.

"For me the keepers of convicts shoulder their carbines and keep watch,
It is I let out in the morning and barred at night.
Not a mutineer walks handcuffed to the jail, but I am handcuffed to him and walk by his side."

XIII

It is charged against Whitman that he does not celebrate love at all, and very justly. He had no purpose to celebrate the sentiment of love. Literature is vastly overloaded with this element already. He celebrates fatherhood and motherhood, and the need of well-begotten, physiologically well-begotten offspring. Of that veiled prurient suggestion which readers so delight in — of "bosoms mutinously fair," and "the soul-lingering loops of perfumed hair," as one of our latest poets puts it — there is no hint in his volume. He would have fallen from grace the moment he had attempted such a thing. Any trifling or dalliance on his part would have been his ruin. Love as a sentiment has fairly run riot in literature. From Whitman's point of view, it would have been positively immoral for him either to have vied with the lascivious poets in painting it as the forbidden, or with the sentimental poets in depicting it as a charm. Woman with him is always the mate and equal of the man, never his plaything,

Whitman is seldom or never the poet of a sentiment, at least of the domestic and social sentiments. His is more the voice of the eternal, abysmal man.

The home, the fireside, the domestic allurements, are not in him; love, as we find it in other poets, is not in him; the idyllic, except in touches here and there, is not in him; the choice, the finished, the

perfumed, the romantic, the charm of art and the delight of form, are not to be looked for in his pages. The cosmic takes the place of the idyllic; the begetter, the Adamic man, takes the place of the lover; patriotism takes the place of family affection; charity takes the place of piety; love of kind is more than love of neighbor; the poet and the artist are swallowed up in the seer and the prophet.

The poet evidently aimed to put in his sex poems a rank and healthful animality, and to make them as frank as the shedding of pollen by the trees, strong even to the point of offense. He could not make it pleasing, a sweet morsel to be rolled under the tongue; that would have been levity and sin, as in Byron and the other poets. It must be direct and rank, healthfully so. The courage that did it, and showed no wavering of self-consciousness, was more than human. Man is a begetter. How shall a poet in our day and land treat this fact? With levity and by throwing over it the lure of the forbidden, the attraction of the erotic? That is one way, the way of nearly all the poets of the past. But that is not Whitman's way. He would sooner be bestial than Byronic, he would sooner shock by his frankness than inflame by his suggestion. And this in the interest of health and longevity, not in the interest of a prurient and effeminate "art." In these poems Whitman for a moment emphasizes sex, the need of sex, and the power of sex. "All were

lacking if sex were lacking." He says to men and women, Here is where you live after all, here is the seat of empire. You are at the top of your condition when you are fullest and sanest there. Fearful consequences follow any corrupting or abusing or perverting of sex. The poet stands in the garden of the world naked and not ashamed. It is a great comfort that he could do it in this age of hectic lust and Swinburnian impotence, — that he could do it and not be ridiculous. To have done it without offense would have been proof that he had failed utterly. Let us be shocked; it is a wholesome shock, like the douse of the sea, or the buffet of the wind. We shall be all the better for it by and by.

XIV

The lover of Whitman comes inevitably to associate him with character and personal qualities. I sometimes meet women whom I say are of the Whitman type — the kind of woman he invoked and predicted. They bear children, and are not ashamed; motherhood is their pride and their joy: they are cheerful, tolerant, friendly, think no evil, meet high and low on equal terms; they walk, row, climb mountains; they reach forth into the actual world of questions and events, open-minded, sympathetic, frank, natural, good-natured; the mates and companions of their husbands, keeping pace with them in all matters; home-makers, but larger than

home, considerate, forgiving, unceremonious, — in short, the large, fresh, wholesome open-air natures whose ideal so completely possessed Walt Whitman.

A British critic wisely says the gift of Whitman to us is the gift of life rather than of literature, but it is the gift of life through literature. Indeed, Whitman means a life as much as Christianity means a life. He says: —

> "Writing and talk do not prove me."

Nothing but the test of reality finally proves him: —

> "The proof of the poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country has absorbed him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."

The proof of Whitman shall be deferred till he has borne fruit in actual, concrete life.

He knew that merely intellectual and artistic tests did not settle matters in his case, or that we would not reach his final value by making a dead-set at him through the purely æsthetic faculties. Is he animating to life itself? Can we absorb and assimilate him? Does he nourish the manly and heroic virtues? Does he make us more religious, more tolerant, more charitable, more candid, more self-reliant? If not, he fails of his chief end. It is doubtful if the purely scholarly and literary poets, like Milton, say, or like our own Poe, are ever absorbed in the sense above implied; while there is little

doubt that poets like Homer, like Shakespeare, are absorbed and modify a people's manners and ideals. Only that which we love affects our lives. Our admiration for art and literature as such is something entirely outside the sources of character and power of action.

Whitman identifies himself with our lives. We associate him with reality, with days, scenes, persons, events. The youth who reads Poe or Lowell wants to be a scholar, a wit, a poet, a writer; the youth who reads Whitman wants to be a man, and to get at the meaning and value of life. Our author's bent towards real things, real men and women, and his power to feed and foster personality, are unmistakable.

Life, reality, alone proves him; a saner and more robust fatherhood and motherhood, more practical democracy, more charity, more love, more comradeship, more social equality, more robust ideals of womanly and manly character, prove him. When we are more tolerant and patient and long-suffering, when the strain of our worldly, commercial spirit relaxes, then is he justified. Whitman means a letting-up of the strain all along the line, — less hurry, less greed, less rivalry, more leisure, more charity, more fraternalism and altruism, more religion, less formality and convention.

"When America does what was promised,
When each part is peopled with free people,

When there is no city on earth to lead my city, the city of
young men, the Mannahatta city — but when the
Mannahatta leads all the cities of the earth,
When there are plentiful athletic bards, inland and sea-
board,
When through these States walk a hundred millions of
superb persons,
When the rest part away for superb persons, and contrib-
ute to them,
When fathers, firm, unconstrained, open-eyed — when
breeds of the most perfect mothers denote America,
Then to me ripeness and conclusion."

XV

After all, I think it matters little whether we call him poet or not. Grant that he is not a poet in the usual or technical sense, but poet-prophet, or poet-seer, or all combined. He is a poet plus something else. It is when he is judged less than poet, or no poet at all, that we feel injustice is done him. Grant that his work is not art, that it does not give off the perfume, the atmosphere of the highly wrought artistic works like those of Tennyson, but of something quite different.

We have all been slow to see that his cherished ends were religious rather than literary; that, over and above all else, he was a great religious teacher and prophet. Had he been strictly a literary poet, like Lowell, or Longfellow, or Tennyson, — that

is, a writer working for purely artistic effects, — we should be compelled to judge him quite differently.

"Leaves of Grass" is a gospel — glad tidings of great joy to those who are prepared to receive it. Its final value lies in its direct, intense, personal appeal; in what it did for Symonds, who said it made a man of him; in what it did for Stevenson, who said it dispelled a thousand illusions; in what it did for Mrs. Gilchrist, who said it enabled her to find her own soul; in what it does for all earnest readers of it in blending with the inmost current of their lives. Whitman is the life-giver of our time. How shall a poet give us life but by making us share his larger measure of life, his larger hope, his larger love, his larger charity, his saner and wider outlook? What are the three great life-giving principles? Can we name them better than St. Paul named them eighteen hundred years ago, — faith, hope, charity? And these are the cornerstones of Whitman's work, — a faith so broad and fervent that it accepts death as joyously as life, and sees all things at last issue in spiritual results; a hope that sees the golden age ahead of us, not behind us; and a charity that balks at nothing, that makes him identify himself with offenders and outlaws; a charity as great as his who said to the thief on the cross, "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise."

To cry up faith, hope, and charity is not to make men partakers of them; but to exemplify them in a survey of the whole problem of life, to make them vital as hearing or eyesight in a work of the imagination, to show them as motives and impulses controlling all the rest, is to beget and foster them in the mind of the beholder.

He is more and he is less than the best of the other poets. The popular, the conventional poets are mainly occupied with the artistic side of things, — with that which refines, solaces, beautifies. Whitman is mainly occupied with the cosmic and universal side of things, and the human and spiritual values that may be extracted from them. His poetry is not the result of the same kind of selection and partiality as that we are more familiar with.

Hence, while the message of Tennyson and his kind is the message of beauty, the message of Whitman is, in a much fuller sense, the message of life. He speaks the word of faith and power. This is his distinction; he is the life-giver. Such a man comes that we may have life, and have it more abundantly.

The message of beauty, — who would undervalue it? The least poet and poetling lisps some word or syllable of it. The masters build its temples and holy places. All own it, all receive it gladly. But the gospel of life, there is danger that we shall not know it when we hear it. It is a harsher and more

heroic strain than the other. It calls no man to his ease, or to be lulled and soothed. It is a summons and a challenge. It lays rude, strong hands upon you. It filters and fibres your blood. It is more of the frost, the rains, the winds, than of cushions or parlors.

The call of life is a call to battle always. We are stronger by the strength of every obstacle or enemy overcome.

"Listen! I will be honest with you,
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes,
These are the days that must happen to you:

"You shall not heap up what is called riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve;
You but arrive at the city to which you were destined — you hardly settle yourself to satisfaction, before you are called by an irresistible call to depart.
You shall be treated to the ironical smiles and mockings of those who remain behind you;
What beckonings of love you receive, you shall only answer with passionate kisses of parting,
You shall not allow the hold of those who spread their reached hands toward you.

"Allons! After the Great Companions! and to belong to them!"

XVI

Whitman always avails himself of the poet's privilege and magnifies himself. He magnifies others in the same ratio, he magnifies all things. "Magnifying and applying come I," he says, "outbidding at the start the old cautious hucksters." Indeed, the character which speaks throughout "Leaves of Grass" is raised to the highest degree of personal exaltation. To it nothing is trivial, nothing is mean; all is good, all is divine. The usual distinctions disappear, burned up, the poet says, for religion's sake. All the human attributes are heightened and enlarged; sympathy as wide as the world; love that balks at nothing; charity as embracing as the sky; egotism like the force of gravity; religious fervor that consumes the coarsest facts like stubble; spirituality that finds God everywhere every hour of the day; faith that welcomes death as cheerfully as life; comradeship that would weld the nation into a family of brothers; sexuality that makes prudes shudder; poetic enthusiasm that scornfully dispenses with all the usual adventitious aids; and in general a largeness, coarseness, and vehemence that are quite appalling to the general reader. Lovers of poetry will of necessity be very slow in adjusting their notions to the standards of "Leaves of Grass." It is a survey of life and of the world from the cosmic rather than from the conventional standpoint. It car-

ries the standards of the natural universal into all fields.

Some men have accepted poverty and privation with such contentment and composure as to make us almost envious of their lot; and Whitman accepts the coarser, commoner human elements which he finds in himself, and which most of us try to conceal or belittle, with such frankness and perception of their real worth that they acquire new meaning and value in our eyes. If he paraded these things unduly, and showed an overweening preference for them, as some of his critics charge, this is of course an element of weakness.

His precept and his illustration, carried out in life, would fill the land with strong, native, original types of men and women animated by the most vehement comradeship, selfism and otherism going hand in hand.

HIS RELATION TO CULTURE

I

"LEAVES OF GRASS" is not the poetry of culture, but it is to be said in the same breath that it is not such a work as an uncultured man produces, or is capable of producing.

The uncultured man does not think Whitman's thoughts, or propose Whitman's problems to himself, or understand or appreciate them at all. The "Leaves" are perhaps of supreme interest only to men of deepest culture, because they contain in such ample measure that without which all culture is mere varnish or veneer. They are indirectly a tremendous criticism of American life and civilization, and they imply that breadth of view and that liberation of spirit — that complete disillusioning — which is the best result of culture, and which all great souls have reached, no matter who or what their schoolmasters may have been.

Our reading public probably does not and cannot see itself in Whitman at all. He must be a great shock to its sense of the genteel and the respectable. Nor can the working people and the unlettered, though they were drawn to Whitman the man, be expected to respond to any considerable extent to

Whitman the poet. His standpoint can be reached only after passing through many things and freeing one's self from many illusions. He is more representative of the time-spirit out of which America grew, and which is now shaping the destiny of the race upon this continent. He strikes under and through our whole civilization.

He despised our social gods, he distrusted our book-culture, he was alarmed at the tendency to the depletion and attenuation of the national type, and he aimed to sow broadcast the germs of more manly ideals. His purpose was to launch his criticism from the basic facts of human life, psychic and physiologic; to inject into the veins of our anæmic literature the reddest, healthiest kind of blood; and in doing so he has given free swing to the primary human traits and affections and to sexuality, and has charged his pages with the spirit of real things, real life.

We have been so long used to verse which is the outcome of the literary impulse alone, which is written at so many removes from the primary human qualities, produced from the extreme verge of culture and artificial refinement, which is so innocent of the raciness and healthful coarseness of nature, that poetry which has these qualities, which implies the body as well as the mind, which is the direct outgrowth of a radical human personality, and which make demands like those made by real

things, is either an offense to us or is misunderstood.

II

Whitman says his book is not a good lesson, but it takes down the bars to a good lesson, and that to another, and that to another still. To take down bars rather than to put them up is always Whitman's aim; to make his reader free of the universe, to turn him forth into the fresh and inexhaustible pastures of time, space, eternity, and with a smart slap upon his back with the halter as a spur and send-off, is about what he would do. His message, first and last, is "give play to yourself;" "let yourself go;" — happiness is in the quest of happiness; power comes to him who power uses.

"Long enough have you timidly waded, holding a plank
by the shore;
Now I will you to be a bold swimmer,
To jump off in the midst of the sea, rise again, nod to
me, shout, and laughingly dash with your hair."

To hold Whitman up to ridicule, and to convict him of grossness and tediousness, is easy enough; first, because he is so out of relation to the modes and tastes of his times, and, secondly, because he has somewhat of the uncouthness and coarseness of large bodies. Then his seriousness and simplicity, like that of Biblical and Oriental writers, — a kind

of childish inaptness and homeliness, — often exposes him to our keen, almost abnormal sense of the ridiculous. He was deficient in humor, and he wrote his book in entire obliviousness of social usages and conventions, so that the perspective of it is not the social or indoor perspective, but that of life and nature at large, careering and unhampered. It is probably the one modern poem whose standards are not social and what are called artistic.

Its atmosphere is always that of the large, free spaces of vast, unhoused nature. It has been said that the modern world could be reconstructed from "Leaves of Grass," so compendious and all-inclusive is it in its details; but of the modern world as a social organization, of man as the creature of social usages and prohibitions, of fashions, of dress, of ceremony, — the indoor, parlor and drawing-room man, — there is no hint in its pages. In its matter and in its spirit, in its standards and in its execution, in its ideals and in its processes, it belongs to and affiliates with open-air nature, often reaching, I think, the cosmic and unconditioned. In a new sense is Whitman the brother of the orbs and cosmic processes, "conveying a sentiment and invitation of the earth." All his enthusiasms, all his sympathies have to do with the major and fundamental elements of life. He is a world-poet. We do not readily adjust our indoor notions to him. Our culture-standards do not fit him.

III

The problem of the poet is doubtless more difficult in our day than in any past day; it is harder for him to touch reality.

The accumulations of our civilization are enormous: an artificial world of great depth and potency overlies the world of reality; especially does it overlie the world of man's moral and intellectual nature. Most of us live and thrive in this artificial world, and never know but it is the world of God's own creating. Only now and then a man strikes his roots down through this made land into fresh, virgin soil. When the religious genius strikes his roots through it, and insists upon a present revelation, we are apt to cry "heretic;" when the poet strikes his roots through it, as Whitman did, and insists upon giving us reality, — giving us himself before custom or law, — we cry "barbarian," or "art-heretic," or "outlaw of art."

In the countless adjustments and accumulations, and in the oceanic currents of our day and land, the individual is more and more lost sight of, — merged, swamped, effaced. See him in Whitman rising above it all. See it all shot through and through with his quality and obedient to his will. See the all-leveling tendency of democracy, the effacing and sterilizing power of a mechanical and industrial age, set at naught or reversed by a single towering

personality. See America, its people, their doings, their types, their good and evil traits, all bodied forth in one composite character, and this character justifying itself and fronting the universe with the old joy and contentment.

IV

"The friendly and flowing savage, who is he?
Is he waiting for civilization, or is he past it and master of it?"

Do we not, consciously or unconsciously, ask this or a similar question of every poet or artist whom we pass in review before us? Is he master of his culture, or does it master him? Does he strike back through it to simple, original nature, or is he a potted plant? Does he retain the native savage virtues, or is he entirely built up from the outside? We constantly mistake culture for mere refinement, which it is not: it is a liberating process; it is a clearing away of obstructions, and the giving to inherent virtues a chance to express themselves. It makes savage nature friendly and considerate. The aim of culture is not to get rid of nature, but to utilize nature. The great poet is always a "friendly and flowing savage," the master and never the slave of the complex elements of our artificial lives.

Though our progress and civilization are a triumph over nature, yet in an important sense we never get away from nature or improve upon her.

Her standards are still our standards, her sweetness and excellence are still our aim. Her health, her fertility, her wholeness, her freshness, her innocence, her evolution, we would fain copy or reproduce. We would, if we could, keep the pungency and aroma of her wild fruit in our cultivated specimens, the virtue and hardiness of the savage in our fine gentlemen, the joy and spontaneity of her bird-songs in our poetry, the grace and beauty of her forms in our sculpture and carvings.

A poetic utterance from an original, individual standpoint, something definite and characteristic, — this is always the crying need. What a fine talent has this or that young British or American poet whom we might name! But we see that the singer has not yet made this talent his own; it is a kind of borrowed capital; it is the general taste and intelligence that speak. When will he redeem all these promises, and become a fixed centre of thought and emotion in himself? To write poems is no distinction; to be a poem, to be a fixed point amid the seething chaos, a rock amid the currents, giving your own form and character to them, — that is something.

It matters little, as Whitman himself says, who contributes the mass of poetic verbiage upon which any given age feeds.

But for a national first-class poem, or a great work of the imagination of any sort, the man is

everything, because such works finally rest upon primary human qualities and special individual traits. A richly endowed personality is always the main dependence in such cases, or, as Goethe says, "in the great work the great person is always present as the great factor."

"Leaves of Grass" is as distinctly an emanation from Walt Whitman, from his quality and equipment as a man apart from anything he owed to books or to secondary influences, as a tree is an emanation from the soil. It is, moreover, an emanation from him as an American in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and as a typical democratic composite man, a man of the common people, bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, but with an extraordinary endowment of spiritual and intellectual power, to which he has given full swing without abating one jot or tittle the influence of his heritage of the common stock.

V

There is one important quality that enters into all first-class literary production and into all art, which is taken little account of in current criticism: I mean the quality of the manly, — the pulse and pressure of manly virility and strength. Goethe spoke of it to Eckermann as a certain urgent power in which the art of his time was lacking. The producers had taste and skill, but were not masterful

as men. Goethe always looked straight through the work to the man behind it; in art and poetry the personality was everything. The special talent of one kind or another was quite secondary. The greatest works are the least literary. To speak in literature as a man, and not merely as a scholar or professional littérateur, is always the crying need. The new poet has this or that gift, but what is the human fund back of all? What is his endowment of the common universal human traits? How much of a man is he? His measure in this respect will be the measure of the final value of his contribution.

The decadence of literature sets in when there is more talent than character in current production; when rare literary and artistic gifts no longer come wedded to large human and manly gifts; when taste is fastidious rather than robust and hearty. When was there a man born to English or American literature with a large endowment of the universal human qualities, or with those elements that give breadth and power, and which lead art rather than follow it? We are living in an age of great purity and refinement of taste in art and letters, but destitute of power. Goethe spoke of Walter Scott not merely as a great talent, but as a "comprehensive nature." Without this comprehensive nature as a setting, his great talent would have amounted to but little. This gives the weight,

the final authority. How little there was on the surface of Scott of the literary keenness, subtlety, knowingness of later producers, and yet how far his contribution surpasses theirs in real human pathos and suggestiveness!

The same might be said of Count Tolstoï, who is also, back of all, a great loving nature.

One has great joy in Whitman because he is beyond and over all a large and loving personality; his work is but a thin veil through which a great nature clearly shows. The urgent power of which Goethe speaks is almost too strong, — too strong for current taste: we want more art and less man, more literature and less life. It is not merely a great mind that we feel, but a great character. It penetrates every line, and indeed makes it true of the book that whoever "touches this touches a man."

The lesson of the poet is all in the direction of the practical manly and womanly qualities and virtues, — health, temperance, sanity, power, endurance, aplomb, — and not at all in the direction of the literary and artistic qualities or culture.

"To stand the cold or heat, to take good aim with a gun,
to sail a boat, to manage horses, to beget superb children,
To speak readily and clearly, to feel at home among common people,
To hold our own in terrible positions on land and sea."

All his aims, ideas, impulses, aspirations, relate to life, to personality, and to power to deal with real things; and if we expect from him only literary ideas, — form, beauty, lucidity, proportion, — we shall be disappointed. He seeks to make the impression of concrete forces and objects, and not of art.

"Not for an embroiderer
(There will always be plenty of embroiderers, — I welcome them also),
But for the fibre of things, and for inherent men and women.

"Not to chisel ornaments,
But to chisel with free stroke the heads and limbs of plenteous Supreme Gods, that The States may realize them, walking and talking."

His whole work is a radiation from an exemplification of the idea that there is something better than to be an artist or a poet, — namely, to be a man. The poet's rapture springs not merely from the contemplation of the beautiful and the artistic, but from the contemplation of the whole; from the contemplation of democracy, the common people, workingmen, soldiers, sailors, his own body, death, sex, manly love, occupations, and the force and vitality of things. We are to look for the clues to him in the open air and in natural products, rather than in the traditional art forms and methods. He

declares he will never again mention love or death inside of a house, and that he will translate himself only to those who privately stay with him in the open air.

"If you would understand me, go to the heights or water-shore;
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key:
The maul, the oar, the handsaw, second my words.

"No shuttered room or school can commune with me,
But roughs and little children better than they.

"The young mechanic is closest to me — he knows me pretty well.
The woodman, that takes his axe and jug with him, shall take me with him all day;
The farm-boy, ploughing in the field, feels good at the sound of my voice:
In vessels that sail, my words sail — I go with fishermen and seamen, and love them.

"My face rubs to the hunter's face when he lies down alone in his blanket;
The driver, thinking of me, does not mind the jolt of his wagon;
The young mother and old mother comprehend me;
The girl and the wife rest the needle a moment, and forget where they are:
They and all would resume what I have told them."

VI

So far as literature is a luxury, and for the cultured, privileged few, its interests are not in Whitman; so far as poetry represents the weakness of man rather than his strength; so far as it expresses a shrinking from reality and a refuge in sentimentalism; so far as it is aristocratic as in Tennyson, or mocking and rebellious as in Byron, or erotic and mephitic as in Swinburne, or regretful and reminiscent as in Arnold, or a melodious baying of the moon as in Shelley, or the outcome of mere scholarly and technical acquirements as in so many of our younger poets, — so far as literature or poetry, I say, stand for these things, there is little of either in Whitman. Whitman stands for the primary and essential; he stands for that which makes the body as well as the mind, which makes life sane and joyous and masterful. Everything that tends to depletion, satiety, the abnormal, the erotic and exotic, that induces the stress and fever of life, is foreign to his spirit. He is less beautiful than the popular poets, yet more beautiful. He will have to do only with the inevitable beauty, the beauty that comes unsought, that resides in the interior meanings and affiliations, — the beauty that dare turn its back upon the beautiful.

Whitman has escaped entirely the literary disease, the characteristic symptom of which, accord-

ing to Renan, is that people love less things themselves than the literary effects which they produce. He has escaped the art disease, which makes art all in all; the religious disease, which runs to maudlin piety and seeks to win heaven by denying earth; the beauty disease, which would make of poesy a conventional flower-garden. He brings heroic remedies for our morbid sex-consciousness, and for all the pathological conditions brought about by our excess of refinement, and the dyspeptic depletions of our indoor, artificial lives. Whitman withstood the æsthetic temptation, as Amiel calls it, to which most of our poets fall a victim, — the lust for the merely beautiful, the epicureanism of the literary faculties. We can make little of him if we are in quest of æsthetic pleasures alone. "In order to establish those literary authorities which are called classic centuries," says Renan, "something healthy and solid is necessary. Common household bread is of more value here than pastry." But the vast majority of literary producers aim at pastry, or, worse yet, confectionery, — something especially delightful and titivating to the taste. No doubt Renan himself was something of a literary epicure, but then he imposed upon himself large and serious tasks, and his work as a whole is solid and nourishing; his charm of style does not blind and seduce us. It makes all the difference in the world whether we seek the beautiful through the true, or the true

through the beautiful. Seek ye the kingdom of truth first, and all things shall be added. The novice aims to write beautifully, but the master aims to see truly and to feel vitally. Beauty follows him and is never followed by him.

Nature is beautiful because she is something else first, yes, and last, too, and all the while. Whitman's work is baptized in the spirit of the whole, and its health and sweetness in this respect, when compared with the over-refined artistic works, is like that of a laborer in the fields compared with the pale, dyspeptic ennuyé.

VII

Whitman's ideal is undoubtedly much larger, coarser, stronger — much more racy and democratic — than the ideal we are familiar with in current literature, and upon which our culture is largely based. He applies the democratic spirit not only to the material of poetry, — excluding all the old stock themes of love and war, lords and ladies, myths and fairies and legends, — but he applies it to the form as well, excluding rhyme and measure and all the conventional verse architecture. His work stands or it falls upon its inherent, its intrinsic qualities, the measure of life or power which it holds This ideal was neither the scholar nor the priest, nor any type of the genteel or exceptionally favored or cultivated. His influence does not make for any

form of depleted, indoor, over-refined or extra-cultured humanity. The spirit of his work transferred to practice begets a life full and strong on all sides, affectionate, magnetic, tolerant, spiritual, bold with the flavor and quality of simple, healthful, open-air humanity. He opposes culture and refinement only as he opposes that which weakens, drains, emasculates, and tends to beget a scoffing, carping, hypercritical class. The culture of life, of nature, and that which flows from the exercise of the manly instincts and affections, is the culture implied by "Leaves of Grass." The democratic spirit is undoubtedly more or less jealous of the refinements of our artificial culture and of the daintiness and aloofness of our literature. The people look askance at men who are above them without being of them, who have dropped the traits and attractions which they share with unlettered humanity. Franklin and Lincoln are closer akin to this spirit, and hence more in favor with it, than a Jefferson or a Sumner.

Whitman might be called the poet of the absolute, the unconditioned. His work is launched at a farther remove from our arts, conventions, usages, civilization, and all the artificial elements that modify and enter into our lives, than that of any other man. Absolute candor, absolute pride, absolute charity, absolute social and sexual equality, absolute nature. It is not conditioned by what we deem

modest or immodest, high or low, male or female. It is not conditioned by our notions of good and evil, by our notions of the refined and the select, by what we call good taste and bad taste. It is the voice of absolute man, sweeping away the artificial, throwing himself boldly, joyously, upon unconditional nature. We are all engaged in upholding the correct and the conventional, and drawing the line sharply between good and evil, the high and the low, and it is well that we should; but here is a man who aims to take absolute ground, and to look at the world as God himself might look at it, without partiality or discriminating, — it is all good, and there is no failure or imperfection in the universe and can be none: —

> "Open mouth of my Soul uttering gladness,
> Eyes of my Soul seeing perfection,
> Natural life of me, faithfully praising things,
> Corroborating forever the triumph of things."

He does not take sides against evil, in the usual way, he does not take sides with the good except as nature herself does. He celebrates the All.

Can we accept the world as science reveals it to us, as all significant, as all in ceaseless transmutation, as every atom aspiring to be man, an endless unfolding of primal germs, without beginning, without end, without failure or imperfection, the golden age ahead of us, not behind us?

VIII

Because of Whitman's glorification of pride, egoism, brawn, self-reliance, it is charged that the noble, the cultured, the self-denying, have no place in his system. What place have they in the antique bards? — in Homer, in Job, in Isaiah, in Dante? They have the same place in Whitman, yet it is to be kept in mind that Whitman does not stand for the specially social virtues, nor for culture, nor for the refinements which it induces, nor for art, nor for any conventionality. There are flowers of human life which we are not to look for in Walt Whitman. The note of fine manners, chivalrous conduct, which we get in Emerson; the sweetness and light gospel of Arnold; the gospel of hero-worship of Carlyle; the gracious scholarship of our New England poets, etc., — we do not get in Walt Whitman. There is nothing in him at war with these things, but he is concerned with more primal and elemental questions. He strikes under and beyond all these things.

What are the questions or purposes, then, in which his work has root? Simply put, to lead the way to larger, saner, more normal, more robust types of men and women on this continent; to prefigure and help develop the new democratic man, — to project him into literature on a scale and with a distinctness that cannot be mistaken. To this

end he keeps a deep hold of the savage, the unrefined, and marshals the elements and influences that make for the virile, the heroic, the sane, the large, and for the perpetuity of the race. We cannot refine the elements, — the air, the water, the soil, the sunshine, — and the more we pervert or shut out these from our lives the worse for us. In the same manner, the more we pervert or balk the great natural impulses, sexuality, comradeship, the religious emotion, nativity, or the more we deny and belittle our bodies, the further we are from the spirit of Walt Whitman, and from the spirit of the All.

With all Whitman's glorification of pride, self-esteem, self-reliance, etc., the final lesson of his life and work is service, self-denial, — the free, lavish giving of yourself to others. Of the innate and essential nobility that we associate with unworldliness, the sharing of what you possess with the unfortunate around you, sympathy with all forms of life and conditions of men, charity as broad as the sunlight, standing up for those whom others are down upon, claiming nothing for self which others may not have upon the same terms, — of such nobility and fine manners, I say, you shall find an abundance in the life and works of Walt Whitman.

The spirit of a man's work is everything; the letter, little or nothing. Though Whitman boasts of his affiliation with the common and near at hand,

yet he is always saved from the vulgar, the mean, the humdrum, by the breadth of his charity and sympathy and his tremendous ideality.

Of worldliness, materialism, commercialism, he has not a trace; his only values are spiritual and ideal; his only standards are the essential and the enduring. What Matthew Arnold called the Anglo-Saxon contagion, the bourgeois spirit, the worldly and sordid ideal, is entirely corrected in Whitman by the ascendant of the ethic and the universal. His democracy ends in universal brotherhood, his patriotism in the solidarity of nations, his glorification of the material in the final triumph of the spiritual, his egoism issues at last in complete altruism.

A race that can produce a man of his fibre, his continental type, is yet at its best estate. Did one begin to see evil omen in this perpetual whittling away and sharpening and lightening of the American type, — grace without power, clearness without mass, intellect without character? Then take comfort from the volume and the rankness of Walt Whitman. Did one begin to fear that the decay of maternity and paternity in our older communities and the falling off in the native population presaged the drying up of the race in its very sources? Then welcome to the rank sexuality and to the athletic fatherhood and motherhood celebrated by Whitman. Did our skepticism, our headiness, our

worldliness, threaten to eat us up like a cancer? did our hardness, our irreligiousness, and our passion for the genteel point to a fugitive, superficial race? was our literature threatened with the artistic degeneration, — running all to art and not at all to power? were our communities invaded by a dry rot of culture? were we fast becoming a delicate, indoor, genteel race? were our women sinking deeper and deeper into the "incredible sloughs of fashion and all kinds of dyspeptic depletion," — the antidote for all these ills is in Walt Whitman. In him nature shows great fullness and fertility, and an immense friendliness. He supplements and corrects most of the special deficiencies and weaknesses toward which the American type seems to tend. He brings us back to nature again. The perpetuity of the race is with the common people. The race is constantly dying out at the top, in our times at least; culture and refinement beget fewer and fewer and poorer and poorer children. Where struggle ceases, that family or race is doomed.

> "Now understand me well — it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary."

In more primitive communities, the sap and vitality of the race were kept in the best men, because upon them the strain and struggle were greatest.

War, adventure, discovery, favor virility. Whitman is always and everywhere occupied with that which makes for life, power, longevity, manliness. The scholar poets are occupied with that which makes for culture, taste, refinement, ease, art.

"Leaves of Grass," taken as a whole, aims to exhibit a modern, democratic, archetypal man, here in America, confronting and subduing our enormous materialism to his own purposes, putting it off and on as a garment; identifying himself with all forms of life and conditions of men; trying himself by cosmic laws and processes, exulting in the life of his body and the delights of his senses; and seeking to clinch, to develop, and to realize himself through the shows and events of the visible world. The poet seeks to interpret life from the central point of absolute abysmal man.

The wild and the savage in nature with which Whitman perpetually identifies himself, and the hirsute, sun-tanned, and aboriginal in humanity, have misled many readers into looking upon him as expressive of these things only. Mr. Stedman thinks him guilty of a certain narrowness in preferring, or seeming to prefer, the laboring man to the gentleman. But the poet uses these elements only for checks and balances, and to keep our attention, in the midst of a highly refined and civilized age, fixed upon the fact that here are the final sources of our health, our power, our longevity. The need

of the pre-scientific age was knowledge and refinement; the need of our age is health and sanity, cool heads and good digestion. And to this end the bitter and drastic remedies from the shore and the mountains are for us.

IX

The gospel of the average man, Matthew Arnold thought, was inimical to the ideal of a rare and high excellence. But, in holding up the average man, Whitman was only holding up the broad, universal human qualities, and showing that excellence may go with them also. As a matter of fact, are we not astonished almost daily by the superb qualities shown by the average man, the heroism shown by firemen, engineers, workingmen, soldiers, sailors? Do we not know that true greatness, true nobility and strength of soul, may go and do go with commonplace, every-day humanity? Whitman would lift the average man to a higher average, and still to a higher, without at all weakening the qualities which he shares with universal humanity as it exists over and under all special advantages and social refinements. He says that one of the convictions that underlie his "Leaves" is the conviction that the "crowning growth of the United States is to be spiritual and heroic," — a prophecy which in our times, I confess, does not seem very near fulfillment.

He does not look longingly and anxiously toward the genteel social gods, but quite the contrary. In the library and parlor, he confesses he is as a gawk or one dumb. The great middle-class ideal, which is mainly the ideal of our own people, Whitman flouts and affronts. There are things to him of higher import than to have wealth and be respectable and in the mode.

We might charge him with narrowness and partiality and with seeing only half truths, as Mr. Stedman has done, did he simply rest with the native as opposed to the cultivated, with brawn as opposed to brains. What he does do, what the upshot of his teaching shows, is that he identifies himself with the masses, with those universal human currents out of which alone a national spirit arises, as opposed to isolated schools and coteries and a privileged few. Whitman decries culture only so far as it cuts off from his fellows, clips away or effaces the sweet, native, healthy parts of him, and begets a bloodless, superstitious, infidelistic class. "The best culture," he says, "will always be that of the manly and courageous instincts and loving perceptions, and of self-respect." For the most part, our schooling is like our milling, which takes the bone- and nerve-building elements out of our bread. The bread of life demands the coarse as well as the fine, and this is what Whitman stands for.

In his spirit and affiliation with the great mass

of the people, with the commoner, sturdier, human traits, Whitman is more of the type of Angelo, or Rembrandt, or the antique bards, than he is like modern singers. He was not a product of the schools, but of the race.

HIS RELATION TO HIS COUNTRY AND HIS TIMES

I

IT has been said, and justly I think, that in Whitman we see the first appearance in literature of the genuinely democratic spirit on anything like an ample scale. Plenty of men of democratic tendencies and affiliations have appeared, but none that have carried the temper and quality of the people, the masses, into the same regions, or blended the same humanity and commonness with the same commanding personality and spirituality. In recent English poetry the names of Burns and Wordsworth occur to mind, but neither of these men had anything like Whitman's breadth of relation to the mass of mankind, or expressed anything like his sweeping cosmic emotion. Wordsworth's muse was clad in homespun, but in no strict sense was his genius democratic — using the word to express, not a political creed, but the genius of modern civilization. He made much of the common man, common life, common things, but always does the poet stand apart, the recluse, the hermit, the philosopher, loving and contemplating these things for purposes of his art. Only through intellectual sympathy is

he a part of what he surveys. In Whitman the common or average man has grown haughty, almost aristocratic. He coolly confronts the old types, the man of caste, culture, privileges, royalties, and relegates him to the past. He readjusts the standards, and estimates everything from the human and democratic point of view. In his scheme, the old traditions — the aristocratic, the scholastic, the ecclesiastical, the military, the social traditions — play no part. He dared to look at life, past and present, from the American and scientific standpoint. He turns to the old types a pride and complacency equal to their own.

Indeed, we see in the character which Whitman has exploited and in the interest of which his poems are written, the democratic type fully realized, — pride and self-reliance equal to the greatest, and these matched with a love, a compassion, a spirit of fraternity and equality, that are entirely foreign to the old order of things.

II

At first sight Whitman does not seem vitally related to his own country and people; he seems an anomaly, an exception, or like one of those mammoth sports that sometimes appear in the vegetable world. The Whitman ideal is not, and has never been, the conscious ideal of the mass of our people.

We have aspired more to the ideal of the traditional fine gentleman as he has figured in British letters. There seems to have been no hint or prophecy of such a man as Whitman in our New England literature, unless it be in Emerson, and here it is in the region of the abstract and not of the concrete. Emerson's prayer was for the absolutely self-reliant man, but when Whitman refused to follow his advice with regard to certain passages in the "Leaves," the sage withheld further approval of the work.

We must look for the origins of Whitman, I think, in the deep world-currents that have been shaping the destinies of the race for the past hundred years or more; in the universal loosening, freeing, and removing obstructions; in the emancipation of the people, and their coming forward and taking possession of the world in their own right; in the triumph of democracy and of science; the downfall of kingcraft and priestcraft; the growth of individualism and non-conformity; the increasing disgust of the soul of man with forms and ceremonies; the sentiment of realism and positivism, the religious hunger that flees the churches; the growing conviction that life, that nature, are not failures, that the universe is good, that man is clean and divine inside and out, that God is immanent in nature, — all these things and more lie back of Whitman, and hold a causal relation to him.

III

Of course the essential elements of all first-class artistic and literary productions are always the same, just as nature, just as man, are essentially the same everywhere. Yet the literature of every people has a stamp of its own, starts from and implies antecedents and environments peculiar to itself.

Just as ripe, mellow, storied, ivy-towered, velvet-turfed England lies back of Tennyson, and is vocal through him; just as canny, covenanting, conscience-burdened, craggy, sharp-tongued Scotland lies back of Carlyle; just as thrifty, well-schooled, well-housed, prudent, and moral New England lies back of her group of poets, and is voiced by them, —so America as a whole, our turbulent democracy, our self-glorification, our faith in the future, our huge mass movements, our continental spirit, our sprawling, sublime, and unkempt nature, lie back of Whitman and are implied by his work.

He had not the shaping, manipulating gift to carve his American material into forms of ideal beauty, and did not claim to have. He did not value beauty as an abstraction.

What Whitman did that is unprecedented, was to take up the whole country into himself, fuse it, imbue it with soul and poetic emotion, and recast it as a sort of colossal Walt Whitman. He has not

so much treated American themes as he has identified himself with everything American, and made the whole land redolent of his own quality. He has descended upon the gross materialism of our day and land and upon the turbulent democratic masses with such loving impact, such fervid enthusiasm, as to lift and fill them with something like the breath of universal nature. His special gift is his magnetic and unconquerable personality, his towering egoism united with such a fund of human sympathy. His power is centripetal, so to speak, — he draws everything into himself like a maelstrom; the centrifugal power of the great dramatic artists, the power to get out of and away from himself, he has not. It was not for Whitman to write the dramas and tragedies of democracy, as Shakespeare wrote those of feudalism, or as Tennyson sang in delectable verse the swan-song of an overripe civilization. It was for him to voice the democratic spirit, to show it full-grown, athletic, haughtily taking possession of the world and redistributing the prizes according to its own standards. It was for him to sow broadcast over the land the germs of larger, more sane, more robust types of men and women, indicating them in himself.

In him the new spirit of democracy first completely knows itself, is proud of itself, has faith and joy in itself, is fearless, tolerant, religious, aggressive, triumphant, and bestows itself lavishly upon

all sides. It is tentative, doubtful, hesitating no longer. It is at ease in the world, it takes possession, it fears no rival, it advances with confident step.

No man was ever more truly fathered by what is formative and expansive in his country and times than was Whitman. Not by the literature of his country was he begotten, but by the spirit that lies back of all, and that begat America itself, — the America that Europe loves and fears, that she comes to this country to see, and looks expectantly, but for the most part vainly, in our books to find.

It seems to me he is distinctly a continental type. His sense of space, of magnitude, his processional pages, his unloosedness, his wide horizons, his vanishing boundaries, — always something unconfined and unconfinable, always the deferring and undemonstrable. The bad as well as the good traits of his country and his people are doubtless implied by his work.

If he does not finally escape from our unripe Americanism, if he does not rise through it all and clarify it and turn it to ideal uses, draw out the spiritual meanings, then avaunt! we want nothing of him.

"The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell.
The former I graft and increase upon myself,
The latter I translate into a new tongue."

The vital and the formative the true poet always engrafts and increases upon himself, and thence upon his reader; the crude, the local, the accidental, he translates into a new tongue. It has been urged against Whitman that he expresses our unripe Americanism only, but serious readers of him know better than that. He is easy master of it all, and knows when his foot is upon solid ground. It seems to me that in him we see for the first time spiritual and ideal meanings and values in democracy and the modern; we see them translated into character; we see them tried by universal standards; we see them vivified by a powerful imagination. We see America as an idea, and see its relation to other ideas. We get a new conception of the value of the near, the common, the familiar. New light is thrown upon the worth and significance of the common people, and it is not the light of an abstract idea, but the light of a concrete example. We see the democratic type on a scale it has never before assumed; it is on a par with any of the types that have ruled the world in the past, the military, the aristocratic, the regal. It is at home, it has taken possession, it can hold its own. Henceforth the world is going its way. If it is over-confident, over-self-assertive, too American, that is the surplusage of the poet, of whom we do not want a penny prudence and caution; make your prophecy bold enough and it fulfills itself. Whitman has betrayed no doubt or hesitation in his poetry.

His assumptions and vaticinations are tremendous, but they are uttered with an authority and an assurance that convince like natural law.

IV

I think he gives new meaning to democracy and America. In him we see a new type, rising out of new conditions, and fully able to justify itself and hold its own. It is the new man in the new world, no longer dependent upon or facing toward the old. I confess that to me America and the modern would not mean very much without Whitman. The final proof was wanting till they gave birth to a personality equal to the old types.

Discussions and speculations about democracy do not carry very far, after all; to preach equality is not much. But when we see these things made into a man, and see the world through his eyes, and see new joy and new meaning in it, our doubts and perplexities are cleared up. Our universal balloting, and schooling, and material prosperity prove nothing: can your democracy produce a man who shall carry its spirit into loftiest regions, and prove as helpful and masterful under the new conditions as the by-gone types were under the old?

V

I predict a great future for Whitman, because the world is so unmistakably going his way. The three or four great currents of the century — the democratic current, the scientific current, the humanitarian current, the new religious current, and what flows out of them — are underneath all Whitman has written. They shape all and make all. They do not appear in him as mere dicta, or intellectual propositions, but as impulses, will, character, flesh-and-blood reality. We get these things, not as sentiments or yet theories, but as a man. We see life and the world as they appear to the inevitable democrat, the inevitable lover, the inevitable believer in God and immortality, the inevitable acceptor of absolute science.

We are all going his way. We are more and more impatient of formalities, ceremonies, and make-believe; we more and more crave the essential, the real. More and more we want to see the thing as in itself it is; more and more is science opening our eyes to see the divine, the illustrious, the universal in the common, the near at hand; more and more do we tire of words and crave things; deeper and deeper sinks the conviction that personal qualities alone tell, — that the man is all in all, that the brotherhood of the race is not a dream, that love covers all and atones for all.

Everything in our modern life and culture that tends to broaden, liberalize, free; that tends to make hardy, self-reliant, virile; that tends to widen charity, deepen affection between man and man, to foster sanity and self-reliance; that tends to kindle our appreciation of the divinity of all things; that heightens our rational enjoyment of life; that inspires hope in the future and faith in the unseen, — are on Whitman's side. All these things prepare the way for him.

On the other hand, the strain and strife and hoggishness of our civilization, our trading politics, our worship of conventions, our millionaire ideals, our high-pressure lives, our pruriency, our sordidness, our perversions of nature, our scoffing caricaturing tendencies, are against him. He antagonizes all these things.

The more democratic we become, the more we are prepared for Whitman; the more tolerant, fraternal, sympathetic we become, the more we are ready for Whitman; the more we inure ourselves to the open air and to real things, the more we value and understand our own bodies, the more the woman becomes the mate and equal of the man, the more social equality prevails, — the sooner will come to Whitman fullness and fruition.

VI

Some of our own critics have been a good deal annoyed by the fact that many European scholars and experts have recognized Whitman as the only distinctive American poet thus far. It would seem as if our reputation for culture and good manners is at stake. We want Europe to see America in our literary poets like Lowell, or Longfellow, or Whittier. And Europe may well see much that is truly representative of America in these and in other New England poets. She may see our aspiration toward her own ideals of culture and refinement; she may see native and patriotic themes firing Lowell and Whittier; she may see a certain spirit and temper begotten by our natural environment reflected in Bryant, our delicate and gentle humanities and scholarly aptitudes shining in Longfellow. But in every case she sees a type she has long been familiar with. All the poets' thoughts, moods, points of view, effects, aims, methods, are what she has long known. These are not the poets of a new *world*, but of a new *England*. The new-world book implies more than a new talent, more than a fresh pair of eyes, a fresh and original mind like the poets named; such men are required to keep up the old line of succession in English authorship. What is implied is a new national and continental spirit, which must arise and voice the old eternal truths

through a large, new, democratic personality, — a new man, and, beyond and above him, a new heaven and a new earth.

Our band of New England poets have carried the New England spirit into poetry, — its sense of fitness, order, propriety, its shrewdness, inventiveness, aptness, and its aspiration for the pure and noble in life. They have finely exemplified the best Yankee traits; but in no instance were these traits merged in a personality large enough, bold enough, and copious and democratic enough to give them national and continental significance. It would be absurd to claim that the pulse-beat of a great people or a great era is to be felt in the work of any of these poets.

Whitman is responded to in Europe, because he expresses a new type with adequate power, — not as has been so often urged, simply because he is strange, and gives the jaded literary palate over there a new fillip. He meets the demand for something in American literature that should not face toward Europe, that should joyfully stand upon its own ground and yet fulfill the conditions of greatness. He fully satisfies the thirst for individualism amid these awakening peoples, and the thirst for nationalism also. He realizes the democratic ideal, no longer tentative or apologetic, but taking possession of the world as its own and reappraising the wares it finds there.

VII

The American spirit is a continental spirit; there is nothing insular or narrow about it. It is informal, nonchalant, tolerant, sanguine, adaptive, patient, candid, puts up with things, unfastidious, unmindful of particulars; disposed to take short cuts, friendly, hospitable, unostentatious, inclined to exaggerate, generous, unrefined, — never meddlesome, never hypercritical, never hoggish, never exclusive. Whitman shared the hopeful optimistic temperament of his countrymen, the faith and confidence begotten by a great, fertile, sunny land. He expresses the independence of the people, — their pride, their jealousy of superiors, their contempt of authority (not always beautiful). Our want of reverence and veneration are supplemented in him with world-wide sympathies and good-fellowship.

Emerson is our divine man, the precious quintessence of the New England type, invaluable for his stimulating and ennobling strain; but his genius is too astral, too select, too remote, to incarnate and give voice to the national spirit. Clothe him with flesh and blood, make his daring affirmations real and vital in a human personality and imbued with the American spirit, and we are on the way to Whitman.

Moreover, the strong, undisguised man-flavor of "Leaves of Grass," the throb and pressure in it of

those things that make life rank and make it masterful, and that make for the virility and perpetuity of the race, are, if it must be confessed, more keenly relished abroad than in this country, so thoroughly are we yet under the spell of the merely refined and conventional. We fail to see that in letters, as in life, the great prizes are not to the polished, but to the virile and the strong.

VIII

Democracy is not so much spoken of in the "Leaves" as it is it that speaks. The common, the familiar, are not denied and left behind, they are made vital and masterful; it is the "divine average" that awakens enthusiasm. Humanity is avenged upon the scholar and the "gentleman" for the slights they have put upon it; creeds and schools in abeyance; personal qualities, force of character, to the front. Whitman triumphs over the mean, the vulgar, the commonplace, by accepting them and imbuing them with the spirit of an heroic ideal. Wherever he reveals himself in his work, it is as one of the common people, never as one of a coterie or of the privileged and cultivated. He is determined there shall be no mistake about it. He glories in the common heritage. He emphasizes in himself the traits which he shares with workingmen, sailors, soldiers, and those who live in the open air, even laying claim to the "rowdy-

ish." He is proud of freckles, sun-tan, brawn, and holds up the powerful and unrefined.

"I am enamour'd of growing out-doors,
Of men that live among cattle or taste of the ocean or woods,
Of the builders and steerers of ships and the wielders of axes and mauls, and the drivers of horses;
I can eat and sleep with them week in and week out."

"Nothing endures," he says, "but personal qualities." "Produce great persons and the rest follows." Does he glory in the present? he reverently bows before the past also. Does he sound the call of battle for the Union? but he nourishes the sick and wounded of the enemy as well. Does he flout at the old religions? but he offers a larger religion in their stead. He is never merely negative, he is never fanatical, he is never narrow. He sees all and embraces and encloses all.

Then we see united and harmonized in Whitman the two great paramount tendencies of our time and of the modern world, — the altruistic or humanitarian tendency and the individualistic tendency; or, democracy and individualism, pride and equality, or, rather, pride in equality. These two forces, as they appear in separate individuals, are often antagonistic. In Carlyle, individualism frowned upon democracy. In Whitman they are blended and work together. Never was such audacious and

uncompromising individualism, and never was such bold and sweeping fraternalism or altruism. The great pride of man in himself, which is one motif of the poems, flows naturally into the great pride of man in his fellows; his egoism does not separate him from, but rather unites him with, all men. What he assumes they shall assume, and what he claims for himself he demands in the same terms for all. He has set such an example of self-trust and self-assertion as has no parallel in our literature, at the same time that he has set an equal example in practical democracy and universal brotherhood.

IX

Whitman's democracy is the breath of his nostrils, the light of his eyes, the blood in his veins. The reader does not feel that here is some fine scholar, some fine poet singing the praises of democracy; he feels that here is a democrat, probably, as Thoreau surmised, the greatest the world has yet seen, turning the light of a great love, a great intellect, a great soul, upon America, upon contemporary life and events, and upon the universe, and reading new lessons, new meanings, therein. He is a great poet and prophet, speaking through the average man, speaking as one of the people, and interpreting life from the point of view of absolute democracy.

True, the people in their average taste and perceptions are crude and flippant and superficial, and often the victims of mountebanks and fools; yet, as forming the body of our social and political organism, and the chief factor in the world-problem of to-day, they are the exponents of great forces and laws, and often, in emergencies, show the wisdom and unimpeachableness of Nature herself. Deep-hidden currents and forces in them are liable to come to the surface, and when the politicians get in their way, or miscalculate them, as so often happens, they are crushed. Whitman is a projection into literature of the cosmic sense and conscience of the people, and their participation in the forces that are shaping the world in our century. Much comes to a head in him, much comes to joyous speech and song, that heretofore had only come to thought and speculation. A towering, audacious personality has appeared which is strictly the fruit of the democratic spirit, and which has voiced itself in an impassioned utterance touching the whole problem of national and individual life.

X

The Whitman literature is democratic, not in the sense that it caters to the taste of the masses or to the taste of the average man; for, as a matter of fact, the masses and the average man are likely to be the last to recognize its value. The common

people, the average newspaper-reading citizens, are much more likely to be drawn by the artificial and the conventional. But it is democratic because it is filled with the spirit of absolute human equality and brotherhood, and gives out the atmosphere of the universal, primary, human traits. The social, artificial, accidental distinctions of wealth, culture, position, etc., have not influenced the poet in the slightest degree. Whitman finds his joy and his triumph, not in being better than other people or above them, but in being one with them, and sharing their sins as well as their virtues.

> "As if it harm'd me, giving others the same chances and rights as myself — as if it were not indispensable to my own rights that others possess the same."

This is one step further than others have taken, and makes democracy complete in itself. Again, his work identifies itself with the democratic ideal in getting rid of the professional and arbitrary elements of poetry, and appealing to the reader entirely through its spirit and content. It is as democratic in this respect as the workman in the field, or the mechanic at his bench.

The poems are bathed and flooded with the quality of the common people; with the commonness and nearness which they share with real things and with all open-air nature, — with hunters, travelers, soldiers, workers in all fields, and with rocks, trees,

and woods. It is only in the spirit of these things that a man himself can have health, sweetness, and proportion; and only in their spirit that he can give an essentially sound judgment of a work of art, no matter what the subject of it may be.

This spirit of the "commonest, cheapest, nearest" is the only spirit in which man's concrete life can be carried forward. We do not live and breathe and grow and multiply, we do not have health and sanity and wholeness and proportion, we do not subdue and improve and possess the earth, in the spirit of something exclusive, exceptional, far-away, aristocratic, but in the spirit of the common and universal. The only demand is that, in a work of art, the common or universal shall be vitalized with poetic thought and enthusiasm, or imbued with the ideal of a rare and high excellence.

XI

Our critics have been fond of taunting Whitman with the fact that the common people, the workers, of whom he makes so much, and to whom he perpetually appeals, do not read him, or show any liking for his poems at all.

Whitman's appeal to the common people, to the democratic masses, is an appeal to the future; it is an appeal to the universal human conscience and intelligence, as they exist above and beneath all special advantages of birth and culture and stand

related to the total system of things. It also calls attention to the fact that the spirit in which he writes, and in which he is to be read, is the spirit of open-air life and nature.

> "No school or shutter'd room commune with me,
> But roughs and little children, better than they,"

because the simple, unforced, unrefined elements of human nature are those out of which the poems sprang and with which they are charged. Their spirit is closer akin to unlettered humanity than to the over-intellectual and sophisticated products of the schools.

Of course "roughs and little children" can make nothing of "Leaves of Grass," but unless the trained reader has that fund of fresh, simple, wholesome nature, and the love for real things, which unlettered humanity possesses, he will make nothing of it either.

XII

It has been truly said that "the noblest seer is ever over-possessed." This has been the case with nearly all original, first-class men. Carlyle furnished a good illustration of its truth in our own time. He was over-possessed with his idea of the hero and hero-worship. And it may be that Whitman was over-possessed with the idea of democracy, America, nationality, and the need of a radically new departure in poetic literature. Yet none knew

better than he that in the long run the conditions of life and of human happiness and progress remain about the same; that the same price must still be paid for the same things; that character alone counts; that the same problem "how to live" ever confronts us; and that democracy, America, nationality, are only way-stations, and by no means the end of the route. The all-leveling tendency of democracy is certainly not in the interest of literature. The world is not saved by the average man, but by the man much above the average, the rare and extraordinary man, — by the "remnant," as Arnold called them.

No one knew this better than Whitman, and he said that "one main genesis-motive" of his "Leaves" was the conviction that the crowning growth of the United States was to be spiritual and heroic. Only "superb persons" can finally justify him.

HIS RELATION TO SCIENCE

I

THE stupendous disclosures of modern science, and what they mean when translated into the language of man's ethical and æsthetic nature, have not yet furnished to any considerable extent the inspiration of poems. That all things are alike divine, that this earth is a star in the heavens, that the celestial laws and processes are here underfoot, that size is only relative, that good and bad are only relative, that forces are convertible and interchangeable, that matter is indestructible, that death is the law of life, that man is of animal origin, that the sum of forces is constant, that the universe is a complexus of powers inconceivably subtle and vital, that motion is the law of all things, — in fact, that we have got rid of the notions of the absolute, the fixed, the arbitrary, and the notion of origins and of the dualism of the world, — to what extent will these and kindred ideas modify art and all æsthetic production? The idea of the divine right of kings and the divine authority of priests is gone; that in some other time or some other place God was nearer man than now and here, — this idea is gone. Indeed, the whole of man's spiritual and religious belief which forms the background of literature has

changed, — a change as great as if the sky were to change from blue to red or to orange. The light of day is different. But literature deals with life, and the essential conditions of life, you say, always remain the same. Yes, but the expression of their artistic values is forever changing. If we ask where is the modern imaginative work that is based upon these revelations of science, the work in which they are the blood and vital juices, I answer, "Leaves of Grass," and no other. The work is the outgrowth of science and modern ideas, just as truly as Dante is the outgrowth of mediæval ideas and superstitions; and the imagination, the creative spirit, is just as unhampered in Whitman as in Dante or in Shakespeare. The poet finds the universe just as plastic and ductile, just as obedient to his will, and just as ready to take the impress of his spirit, as did these supreme artists. Science has not hardened it at all. The poet opposes himself to it, and masters it and rises superior. He is not balked or oppressed for a moment. He knows from the start what science can bring him, what it can give, and what it can take away; he knows the universe is not orphaned; he finds more grounds than ever for a pæan of thanksgiving and praise. His conviction of the identity of soul and body, matter and spirit, does not shake his faith in immortality in the least. His faith arises, not from half views, but from whole views. In him the idea of the soul, of humanity, of identity, easily

balanced the idea of the material universe. Man was more than a match for nature. It was all for him, and not for itself. His enormous egotism, or hold upon the central thought or instinct of human worth and import, was an anchor that never gave way. Science sees man as the ephemeron of an hour, an iridescent bubble on a seething, whirling torrent, an accident in a world of incalculable and clashing forces. Whitman sees him as inevitable and as immortal as God himself. Indeed, he is quite as egotistical and anthropomorphic, though in an entirely different way, as were the old bards and prophets before the advent of science. The whole import of the universe is directed to one man, — to you. His anthropomorphism is not a projection of himself into nature, but an absorption of nature in himself. The tables are turned. It is not alien or superhuman beings that he sees and hears in nature, but his own that he finds everywhere. All gods are merged in himself.

Not the least fear, not the least doubt or dismay, in this book. Not one moment's hesitation or losing of the way. And it is not merely an intellectual triumph, but the triumph of soul and personality. The iron knots are not untied, they are melted. Indeed, the poet's contentment and triumph in view of the fullest recognition of all the sin and sorrow of the world, and of all that baffles and dwarfs, is not the least of the remarkable features of the book.

II

Whitman's relation to science is fundamental and vital. It is the soil under his feet. He comes into a world from which all childish fear and illusion has been expelled. He exhibits the religious and poetic faculties perfectly adjusted to a scientific, industrial, democratic age, and exhibits them more fervent and buoyant than ever before. We have gained more than we have lost. The world is anew created by science and democracy, and he pronounces it good with the joy and fervor of the old faith.

He shared with Tennyson the glory of being one of the two poets of note in our time who have drawn inspiration from this source, or viewed the universe through the vistas which science opens. Renan thought the modern poetic or imaginative contemplation of the universe puerile and factitious compared with the scientific contemplation of it. The one, he said, was stupendous; the other childish and empty. But Whitman and Tennyson were fully abreast with science, and often afford one a sweep of vision that matches the best science can do. Tennyson drew upon science more for his images and illustrations than Whitman did; he did not absorb and appropriate its results in the wholesale way of the latter. Science fed Whitman's imagination and made him bold; its effects were moral and spiritual. On Tennyson its effects were mainly

intellectual; it enlarged his vocabulary without strengthening his faith. Indeed, one would say, from certain passages in "In Memoriam," that it had distinctly weakened his faith. Let us note for a moment the different ways these two poets use science. In his poem to FitzGerald, Tennyson draws upon the nebular hypothesis for an image:

> "A planet equal to the sun
> Which cast it, that large infidel
> Your Omar."

In "Despair" there crops out another bold inference of science, the vision "of an earth that is dead."

> "The homeless planet at length will be wheel'd thro' the
> silence of space,
> Motherless evermore of an ever-vanishing race."

In the "Epilogue" he glances into the sidereal heavens: —

> "The fires that arch this dusky dot —
> Yon myriad-worlded way —
> The vast sun-clusters' gather'd blaze,
> World-isles in lonely skies,
> Whole heavens within themselves, amaze
> Our brief humanities."

As our American poet never elaborates in the Tennysonian fashion, he does not use science as material, but as inspiration. His egoism and an-

thropomorphic tendency are as great as those of the early bards, and he makes everything tell for the individual. Let me give a page or two from the "Song of Myself," illustrative of his attitude in this respect: —

"I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss,
fruits, grains, esculent roots,
And am stuccoed with quadrupeds and birds all over,
And have distanced what is behind me for good reasons,
And call anything close again, when I desire it.

"In vain the speeding or shyness,
In vain the plutonic rocks send their old heat against any approach,
In vain the mastodon retreats beneath its own powdered bones,
In vain objects stand leagues off, and assume manifold shapes,
In vain the ocean settling in hollows, and the great monsters lying low,
In vain the buzzard houses herself with the sky,
In vain the snake slides through the creepers and logs,
In vain the elk takes to the inner passes of the woods,
In vain the razor-billed auk sails far north to Labrador,
I follow quickly, I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff.

. . . . . .

"I am an acme of things accomplished, and I am an endorser of things to be.
My feet strike an apex of the apices of the stairs,

On every step bunches of ages, and large bunches between the steps,
All below duly traveled, and still I mount and mount.

"Rise after rise bow the phantoms behind me,
Afar down I see the huge first Nothing — I know I was even there,
I waited unseen and always, and slept through the lethargic mist,
And took my time, and took no hurt from the fetid carbon.

"Long I was hugged close — long and long.
Immense have been the preparations for me,
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me,
Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen,
For room to me stars kept aside in their own rings,
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me.

"Before I was born out of my mother, generations guided me,
My embryo has never been torpid — nothing could overlay it.
For it the nebula cohered to an orb,
The long, slow strata piled to rest it in,
Vast vegetables gave it sustenance,
Monstrous sauroids transported it in their mouths, and deposited it with care.
All forces have been steadily employed to complete and delight me,
Now I stand on this spot with my Soul.

"I open my scuttle at night and see the far-sprinkled systems,
And all I see, multiplied as high as I can cipher, edge but the rim of the farther systems:
Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward, outward, and forever outward:
My sun has his sun, and around him obediently wheels;
He joins with his partners a group of superior circuit,
And greater sets follow, making specks of the greatest inside them.

"There is no stoppage, and never can be stoppage;
If I, you, the worlds, all beneath or upon their surfaces, and all the palpable life, were this moment reduced back to a pallid float, it would not avail in the long run.
We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
And as surely go as much farther — and then farther and farther.
A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard the span to make it impatient.
They are but parts — anything is but a part,
See ever so far, there is limitless space outside of that,
Count ever so much, there is limitless time around that."

In all cases, Whitman's vision is as large as that of science, but it is always the vision of a man and not that of a philosopher. His report of the facts has an imaginative lift and a spiritual significance

which the man of science cannot give them. In him, for the first time, a personality has appeared that cannot be dwarfed and set aside by those things. He does not have to stretch himself at all to match in the human and emotional realm the stupendous discoveries and deductions of science. In him man refuses to stand aside and acknowledge himself of no account in the presence of the cosmic laws and areas. It is all for him, it is all directed to him; without him the universe is an empty void. This is the "full-spread pride of man," the pride that refuses to own any master outside of itself.

"I know my omnivorous words, and cannot say any less,
And would fetch you, whoever you are, flush with myself."

HIS RELATION TO RELIGION

WHITMAN, as I have elsewhere said, was swayed by two or three great passions, and the chief of these was doubtless his religious passion. He thrilled to the thought of the mystery and destiny of the soul.

"The soul,
Forever and forever — longer than soil is brown and solid — longer than water ebbs and flows."

He urged that there could be no permanent national grandeur, and no worthy manly or womanly development, without religion.

"I specifically announce that the real and permanent grandeur of these States must be their Religion,
Otherwise there is no real and permanent grandeur."

All materials point to and end at last in spiritual results.

"Each is not for its own sake,
I say the whole earth and all the stars in the sky are for Religion's sake."

All our ostensible realities, our art, our literature, our business pursuits, etc., are but fuel to religion.

"For not all matter is fuel to heat, impalpable flame, the essential life of the earth,
Any more than such are to Religion."

Again he says: —

"My comrade!
For you to share with me two greatnesses — And a third one, rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy — and the greatness of Religion."

It is hardly necessary to say that the religion which Whitman celebrates is not any form of ecclesiasticism. It is larger than any creed that has yet been formulated. It is the conviction of the man of science touched and vivified by the emotion of the prophet and poet. As exemplified in his life its chief elements are faith, hope, charity. Its object is to prepare you to live, not to die, and to "earn for the body and the mind what adheres and goes forward, and is not dropped by death."

The old religion, the religion of our fathers, was founded upon a curse. Sin, repentance, fear, Satan, hell, play important parts. Creation had resulted in a tragedy in which the very elemental forces were implicated. The grand scheme of an infinite Being failed through the machinations of the Devil. Salvation was an escape from a wrath to come. The way was through agony and tears. Heaven was only gained by denying earth. The great mass of the human race was doomed to endless perdition. Now there is no trace of this religion in Whitman, and it

does not seem to have left any shadow upon him. Ecclesiasticism is dead; he clears the ground for a new growth. To the priests he says: "Your day is done."

He sings a new song; he tastes a new joy in life. The earth is as divine as heaven, and there is no god more sacred than yourself. It is as if the world had been anew created, and Adam had once more been placed in the garden, — the world, with all consequences of the fall, purged from him.

Hence we have in Whitman the whole human attitude toward the universe, toward God, toward life and death, toward good and evil, completely changed. We have absolute faith and acceptance in place of the fear and repentance of the old creeds; we have death welcomed as joyously as life, we have political and social equality as motifs and impulses, and not merely as sentiments. He would show us the muse of poetry, as impartial, as sweeping in its vision, as modern, as real, as free from the morbid and make-believe, as the muse of science. He sees good in all, beauty in all. It is not the old piety, it is the new faith; it is not the old worship, it is the new acceptance; not the old, corroding religious pessimism, but the new scientific optimism.

He does not deny, he affirms; he does not criticise, he celebrates; his is not a call to repentance, it is a call to triumph: —

"I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
None has ever yet adored or worship'd half enough,
None has begun to think how divine he himself is, or
how certain the future is."

He accepted science absolutely, yet science was not an end in itself: it was not his dwelling; he but entered by it to an area of his dwelling.

The flower of science was religion. Without this religion, or something akin to it, — without some spiritual, emotional life that centred about an ideal, — Whitman urged that there could be no permanent national or individual development. In the past this ideal was found in the supernatural; for us and the future democratic ages, it must be found in the natural, in the now and the here.

The aristocratic tradition not only largely shaped the literature of the past, it shaped the religion: man was a culprit, his life a rebellion; his proper attitude toward the unseen powers was that of a subject to his offended sovereign, — one of prostration and supplication. Heaven was a select circle reserved for the few, — the aristocracy of the pure and just. The religion of a democratic and scientific era, as voiced by Whitman and as exemplified in his life, is of quite another character, — not veneration, but joy and triumph; not fear, but love: not self-abasement, but self-exaltation; not sacrifice, but service: in fact, not religion at all in the old sense of the spiritual at war with the natural.

the divine with the human, this world a vale of tears, and mundane things but filth and ashes, heaven for the good and hell for the bad; but in the new sense of the divinity of all things, of the equality of gods and men, of the brotherhood of the race, of the identity of the material and the spiritual, of the beneficence of death and the perfection of the universe. The poet turns his face to earth and not to heaven; he finds the miraculous, the spiritual, in the things about him, and gods and goddesses in the men and women he meets. He effaces the old distinctions; he establishes a sort of universal suffrage in spiritual matters; there are no select circles, no privileged persons. Is this the democracy of religion? liberty, fraternity, and equality carried out in the spiritual sphere? Death is the right hand of God, and evil plays a necessary part also. Nothing is discriminated against; there are no reprisals or postponements, no dualism or devilism. Everything is in its place; man's life and all the things of his life are well considered.

Carried out in practice, this democratic religion will not beget priests, or churches, or creeds, or rituals, but a life cheerful and full on all sides, helpful, loving, unworldly, tolerant, open-souled, temperate, fearless, free, and contemplating with pleasure, rather than alarm, "the exquisite transition of death."

A FINAL WORD

AFTER all I have written about Whitman, I feel at times that the main thing I wanted to say about him I have not said, cannot say; the best about him cannot be told anyway. "My final merit I refuse you." His full significance in connection with the great modern movement; how he embodies it all and speaks out of it, and yet maintains his hold upon the primitive, the aboriginal; how he presupposes science and culture, yet draws his strength from that which antedates these things; how he glories in the present, and yet is sustained and justified by the past; how he is the poet of America and the modern, and yet translates these things into universal truths; how he is the poet of wickedness, while yet every fibre of him is sound and good; how his page is burdened with the material, the real, the contemporary, while yet his hold upon the ideal, the spiritual, never relaxes; how he is the poet of the body, while yet he is in even fuller measure the poet of the soul; in fact, how all contradictions are finally reconciled in him, — all these things and more, I say, I feel that I have not set forth with the clearness and emphasis the subject demanded. Other students of him will approach

him on other lines, and will disclose meanings that I have missed.

Writing about him, as Symonds said, is enormously difficult. At times I feel as if I was almost as much at sea with regard to him as when I first began to study him; not at sea with regard to his commanding genius and power, but with regard to any adequate statement and summary of him in current critical terms. One cannot define and classify him as he can a more highly specialized poetic genius. What is he like? He is like everything. He is like the soil which holds the germs of a thousand forms of life; he is like the grass, common, universal, perennial, formless; he is like your own heart, mystical yearning, rebellious, contradictory, but ever throbbing with life. He is fluid, generative, electric; he is full of the germs, potencies, and latencies of things; he provokes thought without satisfying it; he is formless without being void; he is both Darwinian and Dantesque. He is the great reconciler, he united and harmonized so many opposites in himself. As a man he united the masculine and feminine elements in a remarkable degree; he united the innocent vanity of the child with the self-reliance of a god. In his moral aspects, he united egoism and altruism, pride and charity, individualism and democracy, fierce patriotism and the cosmopolitan spirit; in his literary aspects he united mysticism and realism, the poet

and prophet, the local and the universal; in his religious aspects he united faith and agnosticism, the glorification of the body and all objective things, with an unshakable trust in the reality of the invisible world.

Rich in the elements of poetry, a London critic says, almost beyond any other poet of his time, and yet carefully stopping short of the conscious, elaborate, crystallic, poetic work which the critic demanded of him, quite content to hold it all in solution, and give his reader an impulse rather than a specimen.

I have accepted Whitman entire and without reservation. I could not do otherwise. It was clear enough to me that he was to be taken as a whole or not at all. We cannot cut and carve a man. The latest poet brings us poetic wares, curiously and beautifully carved and wrought specimens, some of which we accept and some of which we pass by. Whitman brings us no cunning handicraft of the muses: he brings us a gospel, he brings us a man, he brings us a new revelation of life; and either his work appeals to us as a whole, or it does not so appeal. He will not live in separate passages, or in a few brief poems, any more than Shakespeare or Homer or Dante, or the Bible, so lives.

The chief thing about the average literary poet is his poetic gift, apart from any other consideration;

we select from what he brings us as we select from a basket of fruit. The chief thing about Whitman is the personality which the poetic gift is engaged in exploiting; the excitement of our literary or artistic sense is always less than the excitement of our sense of life and of real things. We get in him a fixed point of view, a new vantage-ground of personality from which to survey life. It is less what he brings, and more what he is, than with other poets. To take him by fragments, picking out poetic tidbits here and there, rejecting all the rest, were like valuing a walk through the fields and woods only for the flowers culled here and there, or the bits of color in the grass or foliage. Is the air, the sunshine, the free spaces, the rocks, the soil, the trees, and the exhilaration of it all, nothing? There are flowers in Whitman, too, but they are amid the rocks or under the trees, and seem quite unpremeditated and by the way, and never the main concern. If our quest is for these alone, we shall surely be disappointed. "In order to appreciate Whitman's poetry and his purpose," says Joel Chandler Harris, "it is necessary to possess the intuition that enables the mind to grasp in instant and express admiration the vast group of facts that make man, — that make liberty, — that make America. There is no poetry in the details; it is all in the broad, sweeping, comprehensive assimilation of the mighty forces behind them, — the inevitable,

unaccountable, irresistible forward movement of man in the making of this Republic."

And again: "Those who approach Walt Whitman's poetry from the literary side are sure to be disappointed. Whatever else it is, it is not literary. Its art is its own, and the melody of it must be sought in other suggestions than those of metre. . . . Those who are merely literary will find little substance in the great drama of Democracy which is outlined by Walt Whitman in his writings, — it is no distinction to call them poems. But those who know nature at first hand — who know man, who see in this Republic something more than a political government — will find therein the thrill and glow of poetry and the essence of melody. Not the poetry that culture stands in expectation of, nor the melody that capers in verse and metre, but those rarer intimations and suggestions that are born in primeval solitudes, or come whirling from the vast funnel of the storm." How admirable! how true! No man has ever spoken more to the point upon Walt Whitman.

The appearance of such a man as Whitman involves deep world-forces of race and time. He is rooted in the very basic structure of his age. After what I have already said, my reader will not be surprised when I tell him that I look upon Whitman as the one mountain thus far in our literary landscape. To me he changes the whole aspect,

almost the very climate, of our literature. He adds the much-needed ruggedness, breadth, audacity, independence, and the elements of primal strength and health. We owe much to Emerson. But Emerson was much more a *made* man than was Whitman, — much more the result of secondary forces, the college, the church, and of New England social and literary culture. With all his fervid humanity and deeply ingrained modernness, Whitman has the virtues of the primal and the savage. "Leaves of Grass" has not the charm, or the kind of charm, of the more highly wrought artistic works, but it has the incentive of nature and the charm of real things. We shall not go to it to be soothed and lulled. It will always remain among the difficult and heroic undertakings, demanding our best moments, our best strength, our morning push and power. Like voyaging or mountain-climbing, or facing any danger or hardship by land or sea, it fosters manly endeavor and the great virtues of sanity and self-reliance.